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ABSTRACT

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC) received sponsored research funding to study adult literacy and numeracy, network with field-based stakeholders, and disseminate findings. It studied these three layers of participant involvement and response to the sponsored research program: research leaders; sponsored researchers; and field--an ill-defined group of stakeholders who were the target of and vehicle for generating research outcomes. Analysis indicated the sponsored research program was acknowledged as an innovative venture that received mixed responses in terms of its value; responses were often dependent on the degree to which participants had been involved in projects or directly benefited from activities; and regardless of the apparently single source of federal funding, the research was viewed as an activity involving federal and state government funding sources, university resources, and substantial in kind resources. Five key dimensions to the research training and mentoring models adopted across states and territories were that they included building research skills; sponsored researcher outcomes included changes in practical capacity to complete a research project; expectations were far-ranging; managing a research agenda involved building a visible research culture; and converting research outcomes into concrete organizational change strategies was recognized as a difficult task. (Appendixes include 67 references and sponsored researchers' and stakeholders' views.) (YLB)

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Keeping a sense of proportion

The impact of sponsored research in the Australian adult literacy and numeracy field: perspectives on the period 1999-2000.

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An investigation by the South Australian Centre

Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium ALNARC

Centre for Studies in Literacy Policy and Learning Cultures
University of South Australia

ALNARC National Research Program 2001-2002

June 2002

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Lana Zannettino was the research assistant on this project, sorting, ordering and collating in ways that provided new insights on the data.

Attempts have been made to remove as many acronyms as possible and present the report in a manner which enables 'outsiders' to understand sponsored research in the literacy and numeracy field without constant reference to a glossary.

Executive Summary

In 1999 the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC) received the first of three years of sponsored research funding from the Department of Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) to undertake research in adult literacy and numeracy, network with field based stakeholders and disseminate the findings of the research. This study used data from the period 1999-2000 to investigate three distinct layers of participant involvement and response to the sponsored research program: the research 'leaders' conceptualizing support; the sponsored researchers undertaking projects; and the 'field' as an ill-defined group of stakeholders who were at once the 'target' of, and the vehicle for generating, research outcomes. This report provides a description and analysis of an innovative program which received a mixed response from stakeholders and participants. Several findings emerge from the analysis:

- The sponsored research program is acknowledged as an innovative venture which receives mixed responses in terms of its value. Responses are often dependent on the degree to which participants have been involved in projects or directly benefited from activities.
- Regardless of the apparently single source of federal funding to ALNARC, the research is viewed as an activity involving (federal and state) government funding sources, university resources, and substantial in kind resources literacy and numeracy providers and educators. The ALNARC research program is viewed as a capacity building exercise that is collective and national with some influence in the international arena.
- There are five key dimensions to the research training and mentoring models adopted across states and territories:

  1. State models of research training and mentoring include building research skills through research training, mentoring, developing documentation, presentation and dissemination skills, and significant expectations of networking before, during and after the projects have been completed.
  2. Sponsored researcher outcomes include changes in practical capacity to complete a research project in the areas of operations, teaching and wider development of knowledge about practice.
  3. Expectations of the Consortium are wide-ranging and include those features which are part of the active discourse of ALNARC Directors and researchers: viz. building a visible research culture and managing a knowledge creation agenda. Responses from Directors, sponsored researchers and stakeholders suggest the program is trying to do too much for too many under existing structures and funding constraints. This leads to critical feedback about the program which cannot always be taken up given resource limits. Some stakeholders also connect ALNARC activities directly with the level of funding or lack thereof for literacy and numeracy research at state and federal levels.
  4. Managing a research agenda involves building a visible research culture and to an extent this has been achieved. Such a culture relies on

continued input from professional development sources beyond the funding scope of the ALNARC program. In addition, how visibility is developed is problematic given the diverse demands and expectations of stakeholders.

5. There is recognition of the variable take-up of research outcomes by stakeholders, and an even more explicit recognition that converting research outcomes into concrete organizational change strategies is a difficult task. This is exacerbated if research challenges "continuous improvement" models of organizational change which may ignore current issues associated with delivery.

Introduction

The relationship between educational research and the teaching profession has been the subject of much debate in Australia (DETYA, 2001a, 2001b) and overseas (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Freeman, 1998; Demetrion, 2000; Norton and Malicky, 2001). Moreover research in vocational education and training (VET) has moved to a place of visibility, if not prominence in Australian debates (Selby Smith et al., 1999; Selby Smith, 1999; Garrick and Rhodes, 2000). Adult literacy and numeracy stakeholders have engaged, eagerly if warily, in these debates (Lo Bianco and Wickert, 2001; *fine* PRINT, 1994) and contributed to a wide range of research outcomes in the field, not least because of the sustained contribution of government funds directed towards this end (see for example Brindley et al., nd).

Adult literacy and numeracy research

Government sponsored research has been a feature of the Australian literacy and numeracy landscape for many years. The Technical and Further Education Commission (TAFEC) funded a number of grants related to literacy provision (see for example Foster and Byrne 1977, 1979). However, while these projects were of themselves useful, they made little impact on the national visibility of adult literacy and numeracy research. A landmark study *No Single Measure* (Wickert 1989) promoted significant public debate about issues and integrated well with government activity during the 1990s to offer an anchor for debate about further adult literacy research. The range of projects sponsored via Commonwealth funding mechanisms since the late 1980s reflects the breadth and scope of change required to establish a body of research work in the adult literacy and numeracy field.

A brief history of funding to build a 'visible culture' of research for adult literacy and numeracy was first flagged under Commonwealth funds tagged as a result of the activity emerging from International Literacy year (1990). These funds, allocated initially to the Adult Literacy Research Network (ALRN) were specifically designed to 'promote a culture of practitioner research' through specific activities identified in an initial contract and Workplan with Language Australia.

This initial funding saw approximately $25,000 redirected to individual states and Territories (with the exception of the ACT) to promote research 'nodes', using a central management structure coordinated by the National Languages and Literacy Institute (now Language Australia). Two triennial funding cycles established the Adult Literacy Research Network (ALRN) as a national network of sponsored practitioner research[1]. After six years of funding, a change in the Australian training climate, a move to 'training packages', and increasing government regulation of literacy and numeracy training saw a 'mood change' in relation to sponsored research outcomes where literacy and numeracy expenditure were concerned. Consultations with the funding agents of the time resulted in reorganization of research funding with

[1] For documentation of this period and its diversity across states see in particular: ALNARC (NSW) Doig and Gunn 1999; Searle 1999; Wignell and Boyd 1994; Wilson 2000; Sanguinetti 1995; Falk and Penson 1996; Shore and Trenerry 1999.

a line of funding established directly with the newly formed Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC)[2]

A brief ALNARC history

A Bridge to the Future. Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998-2003 (ANTA 1998) constituted the basis of discussion for a restructured research agenda established as a result of a call by DEETYA to convene a forum on training packages and literacy/numeracy provision (DEETYA, 1998). At this forum research was framed as an open-ended exploratory process designed to create critical debate and conversation about provision. Hence a research conversation often began from the point of 'how is this working' (with a view to improving practice), rather than from the perspective that what existed must be 'fine-tuned'. The former gave an appearance of openness toward difficulties and problems, whereas the latter seemed to be geared towards 'system tuning' - a strategy which can involve endless busy work at the expense of deeper understandings of the wider changes needed (cf. Collins, 1991).

Second, these discussions framed lifelong learning as a related and connected site for literacy and numeracy research. Hence the focus on training packages was not at the expense of other forms of research. Rather, research about implementing training packages, as a new innovation, was seen to be appropriately complemented by wider research on 'special needs' (the focus in the 1999 Workplan), multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1995) (the focus in the 2000 Workplan), and lifelong learning (a major focus connected to policy analysis in the 2001 Workplan).

Third, the integration of literacy and numeracy into 'training packages' was identified as a primary research interest of the funding agency. Directors of the consortium agreed that this was a legitimate interest, albeit problematic, given the early days of implementation of Training Packages as one aspect of the Federal Government's restructuring of industry training.

In the first year of funding, the funding agreement materialized as a national contract for each state to do the following things:

- undertake up to two national adult literacy and numeracy research studies on topics developed in collaboration with ANTA and DETYA;
- undertake state adult literacy and numeracy research activities in conjunction with other adult literacy and numeracy stakeholders such as policy makers and practitioners;
- assist in professional development activities regarding the applications and implications of adult literacy and numeracy research;
- prepare publications in a variety of formats for the adult literacy and numeracy community and other stakeholders; and
- conduct a national forum on adult literacy and numeracy research. (ALNARC, 1999a: p. 3)

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[2] National funding for the three-year program was approved on a year-by-year basis: 1999 ($494,400); 2000 ($447,397); 2001 ($450,491), with funds generally flowing to the states in April or later of each year.

The Consortium developed briefs for two national research projects endorsed by the funding body:

Project 1: To examine the effects of the inclusion of literacy and numeracy in industry standards in Training Packages on quality of learning and work outcomes.

Project 2: To investigate the effectiveness and responsiveness of literacy and numeracy provision for groups with identified special needs or circumstances (ALNARC, 1999a: p. 3).

In 2000 the Workplan stated:

> The [1999 ALNARC research] reports lay the basis for further research projects to be developed by each state center early in 2000. Members of ALNARC are of the view that the complexity of issues and diversity of sites, practices and packages warrant further data gathering and further in-depth analysis of funding arrangements, programs and outcomes in relation to literacy in training packages. (ALNARC, 2000: p. 2)

The second Workplan therefore built on findings of the previous year. However, it should be noted that when state Workplans for 2000 were submitted to DETYA, final research reports for 1999 were in the main unfinished, having been submitted to the funding body by the various states some months after Workplans for the 2000 funding period were required. In addition, projects were designed to investigate 'multiliteracies' as a follow-up to the focus on 'special needs' adopted in 1999.

In the early stages of the ALNARC research Training Packages were in various stages of development: 36 had been developed nationally; 10 of these were ready for implementation (ALNARC, 1999b); and many others were still in the planning stages. Hence the research undertaken, especially during 1999/2000, provides an interesting example of research about a change process which was not simply confined to the literacy and numeracy field.

Responsive Change

The ALRN evolved as a research network in response to expectations, roles and responsibilities, and relationships that were developing within the field at the time. ALNARC also evolved in response to changing times, funding imperatives and local resource bases. Crucial to the development of the Consortium were Directors' evolving understandings of literacy and numeracy research leadership, and an interest in maintaining the original focus on practitioner research, however problematic. They also had an ongoing interest in developing an 'independent research voice' (ALNARC, 1999c), as far as this was possible when research was tied to investigations of government driven innovations for change (cf. Yates, 1999).

Under various funded projects (for example the ANTA Innovative projects) the Commonwealth has sponsored much work on improving professionalism in the field (see for example Wyatt et al., 1997; Scheeres et al., 1993; Thompson and Chan Lee, 2001); or developing educational products to efficiently progress government agendas for change (DEETYA, 1995; Coates et al., 1994-5; Griffin et al., 1992).

The relationship between these developments and ALNARC is therefore not a separate matter, nor is the parallel development of improved professionalism and

sponsored practice as part of wider vocational education and training sector (Mitchell, Wood & Young 2001; Mitchell and Wood, 2000; Mitchell, Henry and Young, 2001).

The present study addresses the first two years of research funding (1999-2000) and deals in detail with the research mentoring and training component of the program. As will become apparent though, many other activities were undertaken and respondents often connected these wider activities with the research mentoring and training. In addition, data collection shows that many factors were observed to be the results of the ALRN funding 'kicking in' some six years after it had been initiated.

The findings of this impact study have been framed in terms of the degree to which it is perceived that ALNARC has achieved its goals of undertaking and disseminating research and developing a visible research culture in literacy an numeracy. Nevertheless, the impacts are also a function of sustained funding for the notion of 'field based' practitioner research and it is this point which requires brief elaboration before describing the outcomes of the study.

Defining Terms

Practitioner inquiry, action research, practitioner-research, teacher-as-researcher, research in practice, action learning (Drennon, 2000; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Mitchell, 2000; Norton and Malicky, 2000): each of these terms is connected to the notion that teachers occupy a particular relational position to learners that makes it possible for them to 'know' about learning in ways not always accessible to managers, policy makers and academia.

Moreover, a number of these terms are located in traditions that presume teachers always operate through the filter of social relations existing in society, and are therefore not 'benign' or neutral in their role in the classroom. Issues of power in adult literacy and numeracy settings are in many respects similar to other learning settings, in that they exist and are something to be worked through with learners in relation to the material realities produced by and through the literacy challenges which students experience. Somehow though, educators, and in particular literacy and numeracy educators, have been portrayed as overly biased when it comes to interpreting outcomes in their classes, for they are 'too close' to the issue under investigation. In many cases they have been portrayed as having a vested interest in research outcomes given that the outcomes may be linked to their own employment prospects.

Under the above conditions determining what a 'sponsored researcher' was, and who met the criteria for this category, became more complex than was first expected. Initially the term 'practitioner-researcher'[3] was used but there were difficulties in differentiating between 'practitioner-researchers' working with adult literacy and numeracy learners, and 'practitioner-researchers' located in universities or employed by ALNARC centers, who may (or may not) have had a direct connection with adult literacy and numeracy provision. In addition the latter group were funded under substantially different parameters to complete a major project as part of the flagship

[3] Earlier work in some states described the work as 'mentoring novice researchers', however a colleague, Jenny McGuirk, rightly pointed to the way in which this term erased the basis of expertise on which the practitioner-researchers were involved in the first place, their practitioner status.

research representing each state centre[4]. In fact all researchers tended to see themselves as 'sponsored' in one way or another, and some identified more as 'practitioner-researchers' than others.

As it became clearer within the project which researchers were 'sponsored' (or not), the impression from within the field was not so clear. Australian state and federal governments have contributed in diverse ways to knowledge creation, evaluation of innovative programs and consultancy about literacy and numeracy. For survey recipients the funding source of their original grant was sometimes unclear, and after clarification by email a few respondents did not complete the survey as it became clear that they were not recipients of ALNARC grants.

Despite the range of terms used, a central assumption of funding was that it would improve provision. One way to approach the study then was to ask: If building a (visible) research culture is the solution, then what is the problem? To what extent does the ALNARC strategy contribute to understanding and resolving the problem? This study provides one way to help unpack some of the relationships inherent in the assumptions that educational research has an impact, indeed a positive impact, on adult literacy and numeracy provision.

[4] The nature of sponsorship took many forms from short term contract employment in the area of $15,000-$36,000 depending on days per week and duties in relation to research, coordination and so on to the more 'one-off' style of payment. Projects ranged from trialling resources, analysing texts and fieldwork in industry, to more formal documentation of practice, depending on the initial 'contract' agreed with the sponsored researcher.

Design of the study

'Sponsored research' took a number of forms during the period under investigation. Significant consolidation of the various models of mentoring and research training had occurred during the first two years of ALNARC funding, and international consultations suggested that the work was worth documenting. In addition, at the close of 2000, ALNARC funding had been terminated briefly, and then reinstalled, with the 2001 funding period flagged as the final year of funding for the Consortium. It was thus seen to be important to document the particular approaches ALNARC Directors and coordinators had developed as a form of benchmarking for future investigation and analysis.

The project therefore aimed to:

- identify models of sponsored research;
- develop an understanding of the factors involved in initiating, implementing, modifying and sustaining these models;
- examine the range of impacts emerging as a result of implementation.

Research activities

A detailed timeline for the project is set out in Appendix A. Early months of the project were spent preparing ethics protocols, drafting surveys and consulting with Consortium members on the breadth, scope and focus of the study. Data was collected primarily via two web-based surveys, and semi-structured interviews with Consortium Directors. An extensive literature search of related material on practitioner-research and educational research, and collation of ALNARC archival material (communications with members of the Consortium, annual Workplans, meeting minutes, etc.) was also undertaken. In all, five forms of data informed the project:

- research literature
- ALNARC archival material
- surveys by sponsored researchers
- surveys from stakeholders
- semi-structured interviews with Directors.

Sponsored researcher surveys

Sponsored researcher surveys were designed primarily to obtain information about the 'research training and mentoring encounter'. Hence key questions focused on the actual activities that were of most benefit; perceived changes in capacity to talk about their research; and changes in their capacity to teach, do research, or improve organizational effectiveness. Opportunities were given to reflect on changes they would make to their own practice and the nature of support they would prefer to receive in the future. Opportunities were given to reflect on changes they would make to their own practice and on the nature of support they would prefer to receive in the future.

As a parallel project on professional development proceeded within South Australia, it became apparent that survey analysis would have benefited from a question about

prior 'research training' (for example in the form of graduate and postgraduate training) or experience (in the form of other projects undertaken or funding received).

A total of 38 email invitations were sent to sponsored researchers in all states and the Northern Territory. A total of 88 'hits' on the web-based survey were registered as of 21st April, 2002. A total of 8 sponsored researcher forms were received from 5 states, indicating a return rate for this survey of 21%.

See Appendix B for a copy of the Sponsored Researcher survey.

Stakeholder surveys

Questions to stakeholders were designed to obtain impressions of the surface knowledge of ALNARC (its aims, purposes and achievements), and an understanding of the wider impact that stakeholders would explicitly attribute to the ALNARC sponsored research program.

Stakeholder emails were sent far and wide – but with limited response. It is not possible to say what percentage were returned as the design of the research was to provide maximum national coverage. In addition participants were encouraged to pass the website survey link on to other colleagues. Hard copies of the survey were also distributed at the national literacy and numeracy conference held on the Gold Coast in November 2001.

One limitation of this strategy is that some returns indicated limited knowledge of ALNARC, or a clearly different picture of ALNARC possibilities than otherwise identified by Workplans and agreements with the funding body. Despite this ambiguity, all returns were included in the analysis precisely because they point to issues of relevance, spread and diffusion as central factors in how a field understands the role and impact of a sponsored research program (*cf.* DETYA, 2001a).

A total of 251 'hits' were registered on the web-based survey as of 22nd April 2002. A total of 33 stakeholder survey responses were returned with surveys received from all states and territories. Tasmania, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia provided most responses, Northern Territory the fewest.

See Appendix C for a copy of the Stakeholder survey.

A comment on the use of surveys

It is well known that sending surveys to educators in the VET sector is risky business. Apart from the difficulties of selecting a 'best time', when there is no best time for survey completion, there are also issues associated with the number of returns and subsequent challenge of quantity and quality of data received. In this study all surveys were anonymous and submission was via a web-based link to an ALNARC email address at the University of South Australia.

While this method provided people with the opportunity to speak very freely, the length of responses did not reflect the more free and open conversation of the kind one would elicit from guided interviews. Funding for this element of the overall research program did not allow for individual follow-up of submissions. Nevertheless responses do provide insights into the deeper changes researchers experience as they move through the 'research training and mentoring' encounter.

Another study (Shore, forthcoming), investigating a related practitioner research activity, suggests that brief guided interviews with selected participants may in fact yield more useful data in the long run, even if less overall data in quantitative terms.

Conducted at a point of closure, this assisted participants to clarify and name the learning they had gained some time after they had finished their projects. Such closure was deemed positive by the sponsored researchers and the independent researcher who completed the interviews for that project.

Interviews with Directors

A total of six telephone interviews and one face-to-face interview were undertaken with eight people who held primary management or coordination roles in ALNARC during the period 1999-2000. In one state two ALNARC staff completed a joint interview. Two invitations to participate in interviews were declined.

Interviews took the form of a guided conversation about roles and relationships, expectations, outcomes, factors that helped and hindered the program, perceived benefits and other issues related to local and site specific research management and leadership. Not surprisingly comments reflected the connections with the national program and with previous practitioner research activities funded under similar arrangements.

A number of qualitative research inquiry strategies were adopted to establish a degree of 'soundness' of the data. Interviewees were asked to check the transcript for accuracy and amend any inaccuracies. I followed Lincoln and Guba's guidelines for 'member checking' individual data (1985: pp. 314-5) as well as their guidelines for scrutinising the veracity of qualitative research reports (1985: pp. 373-378). Importantly these were used as a guide, rather than a carefully followed checklist. These procedures were adopted to maintain the original agreements of confidentiality, which were renegotiated in light of the final report and the researcher's agreement that state based researchers and providers would not be identified. Where respondents noted incorrect reporting of the models the report was amended. In other cases, additional information was added and this was noted in this final report.

Ways of reading research: ways of reading <u>this</u> research

This study is not a generalisable study of Australian adult literacy and numeracy sponsored research. It provides data on a two-year funding period of ALNARC activity. Nevertheless, several things are revealed by the conjunction of five kinds of data:

- survey responses from sponsored researchers;
- survey responses from stakeholders;
- interviews with Directors;
- analysis and review of literature about practitioner research, adult literacy and numeracy research in Australia, and studies on the impact of research on educational policy and provision; and,
- data from ALNARC archives.

By using these forms of data as positions from which to view the ALNARC sponsored research program (1999-2000) the study offers insights about sponsored research and its capacity to create knowledge about practice, disseminate that knowledge and contribute to its adoption in the wider field (DETYA, 2001a).

No analysis of completed ALNARC projects has been attempted. The documentation produced on 'special needs' projects completed in 1999, on 'multiliteracies'

undertaken in 2000 and the sustained development of a body of work on implementing training packages at a time when little was known about the mechanisms required to make them work, provides an important body of work for future critique and analysis. Some work has already been undertaken to synthesise these materials (see ALNARC, 2000), and other analyses are planned (Searle and Shore forthcoming).

See Appendix D for a full list of documented ALNARC projects. Projects from the 2001-2002 National Research Program are included to provide a more complete picture of the corpus of ALNARC products.

Sponsored research: setting the scene

During 1999-2000 ALNARC research centers were located in six states around Australia. In 2000 an additional two local sites were sponsored in the Northern Territory whilst the Western Australian Centre (active since 1993 as an Adult Literacy Research Network 'node') was defunded. The data collected, and thus the features of sponsorship models derived, covers developments in all sites.

During this time ALNARC centres varied in their staffing levels, amassed experience of research and research management amongst staff supporting the sponsored research program; the number, quality, and level of projects sponsored; and the styles of documentation produced. Nevertheless, several features recur across these diverse contexts.

This report begins with the perspectives of managers and Directors, not because they are most important. Rather, the orientation adopted by these people was generally influential in determining what could happen in each state. The data show the leadership decisions taken by Directors, and in some instances state coordinators, were influenced as much by their professional experience and location, as they were by their personal visions and commitments to literacy and numeracy provision.

First however, a word about funding body expectations helps to set the overall context for the shift to a more structured research program, with explicit funding conditions connecting outcomes to training.

Communication from the funding body suggested the 'timely' integration of literacy and numeracy into Training Packages implementation offered a useful opportunity to do a number of things: share information; inform literacy and numeracy researchers about training package development; and to explore these issues in the context of the future national funding for literacy and numeracy research (DEETYA, 1998). The parameters for future funding would be conditional upon research that centred Training Package development and delivery in the research process.

Directors' expectations

Directors wanted to make a difference, to 'influence policy', shift ideas about provision, 'drive' implementation of industry change via training package delivery, 'produce on-the-job researchers' and generate a higher profile for numeracy which amounted to more than just an '... and numeracy' add-on. Overall these responses expressed desires for a 'better' literacy and numeracy research agenda. In this case 'better' often meant more connected to the field, emerging from and shaped by practitioner knowledge, and using an explicit practitioner and field-based network to inform what was researched, how and with what effect.

Janelle Davis and Jean Searle believe that funding for literacy and numeracy research has become increasingly competitive and this presents challenges for a field-based research program informed by field-based knowledge:

> It is difficult for researchers coming from the relatively new field of adult literacy and numeracy, who may not have a proven track record in research, to demonstrate their expertise and compete. Further, practitioner research is often critiqued as being under-theorized or methodologically unsound.
> (Davis & Searle, 2001: p. 2).

In an attempt to sidestep the conventional binary relationship represented by theory and practice they advocate a 'working together/researching together' relationship which is 'inclusive of different voices and different approaches' (Davis and Searle 2001: p. 2).

The Northern Territory provides a slightly different example of how ALNARC promotes situated research that connects to national agendas:

> the idea was that we had to get some experience here, have a research project on the ground, prove that here in Central Australia, yes we could do ... quality research. ... It was saying 'Yes we can do this' and from a Central Australian perspective, particularly as the key players were people working in Indigenous education, to have local practitioners working in Indigenous education start doing some of the research, particularly stuff that can influence policy, rather than having people from the east coast coming in and saying 'This is what you should be doing'. That was very much a priority for us. ...

Additional pressures influenced Directors' expectations, driven in part by the expectations of the funding body. These pressures included:

- increasing the visibility of research about literacy and numeracy integration in training (specifically Training Packages)
- ensuring that research was undertaken, as much as was possible by practitioners and those 'in' the field; and
- *being seen to be consulting with* stakeholders in the field.

Meeting these expectations presented challenges in themselves.

The first expectation was achieved through state and national development of research monographs, advertising of project progress and outcomes in newsletters, and the development of a national website with greater coverage than was deemed possible in earlier research networks (ALRN, 1998).

The second expectation was achieved through employment of field based educators to complete small grants or provide advisory consultations to the various projects.

The third expectation was enacted through feedback direct to the funding body from professional bodies like ACAL. It also evolved as ALNARC representation was increasingly required or encouraged in the make-up of advisory committees for commonwealth and state funded research projects[5].

This in turn stimulated discussion about two related issues: the relationship between research and government funded consultancy work which requires more than a handmaiden relationship to funding agencies, and second, the ability of advisory processes to provide adequate representation and consultative processes that will actually build new forms of knowledge and understanding rather than re-creating or re-positioning existing understandings.

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[5] This requirement raised interesting questions about the role of ALNARC in 'signing off' on the outcomes of such projects. The question was whether as a diverse group of researchers there could ever be 'one voice' of advice from ALNARC and the extent to which this advice could be taken up on projects that had a more pragmatic role in producing educational products for provision, but these are other stories!

Brindley et al (nd, 13) raises the issue of the role of research and researchers in the enterprise of publicly funded knowledge creation projects. They suggest this involves a "somewhat complex interrelationship between educational research and public policy in Australia" which Porter argues confuses the limits and possibilities of "research for independent policy making". In Porter's mind this relationship is inextricably linked to "bureaucratic agendas set traditionally in State capital cities and more recently in Canberra" (Porter 1993, 56 cited in Brindley, nd 13). These issues were repeated themes in the ALNARC archival material (ALNARC 1999c; ALNARC 2000). The issues emerged in the form of questions such as the following: What are the responsibilities of this group [of Directors]? What is and isn't negotiable? (ALNARC 1999c) and what is the nature of the consortium? What would be our future without funding? (ALNARC 2000).

A further expectation emerged in the implicit and at times explicit assumptions Directors brought to the table about 'research'. They note the desire to disrupt the 'harmful divide' between theory and practice, the importance of local knowledge and building from existing knowledge bases, but also the tension associated with developing new frameworks and readings that offer alternative insights. Many of these conversations pointed also to the dilemma of enhancing a culture of critical debate in a field that was resource and time poor, and often expected different kinds of outcomes from those produced by debate.

It became apparent that Directors' expectations taken individually and at times collectively reflected a common feature of adult literacy provision: the concern to meet all needs and in doing so potentially be left in the position of being all things to all people with limited demarcation of boundaries, and in the long run limited impact. Directors acknowledge the problems of having high expectations of the *researchers*, the *mentors* who supported them and, indeed, of *themselves* in terms of the work that was achievable given the many other commitments within and beyond the universities in which most worked. During the period under study, it was noted that universities continued their processes of radical restructuring, with downsizing of language and literacy departments and adult education departments a feature of the changes which impacted on the ALNARC research program. Moreover organizational 'goodwill' in the form of in-kind contributions, guest speakers, mentoring and support roles became more difficult to source.

Other difficulties arose from more tangible examples of 'high expectations'. There was a recognition that the program of practitioner research was influenced by notions established during previous research network times. Yet literature on the infrastructure and support required for practitioner research repeatedly recognizes the slippage between thinking about a project, implementing it, and the efforts required to read about research, write reflectively and document the project (Norton and Malicky, 2000; Anderson et al., 1994; Drennon, 2000). Moreover these tasks often require qualitatively different skills than the more pragmatic writing tasks involved in everyday teaching. These differences in genre and capacity seemed at times to be incommensurable, especially given the ongoing demands made of sponsored researchers by their places of employment. As one person said of managing the research:

> Yes, everyone wants to be involved and do it. But probably [there's] a limited understanding of what research is in terms of, you know, you come up with the idea and then you start doing it, but then there's a whole huge process that you have to go through and continue, and you have to continue until it's finished.

In essence 'high expectations' oscillated around a set of tensions:

- to give information about research and to engage people in a conversation about it;
- to experience the process and to complete a piece;
- to do research or watch others come in and do it;
- to develop greater visibility of literacy and numeracy research conversations, but in the process to become more visible and potentially more regulated in the kind of research it was possible to do.
- to meet the immediate needs of 'a field' and recognize at the same time that 'the field' is also expanding exponentially in terms of the stakeholders and the range of views held about literacy, literacy outcomes and research that would be most productive in informing these conversations.

Time constraints were also recurring features of the Directors' interviews. Nevertheless, there was also a recognition that time and more resources could not adequately address the underlying issue that the projects were trying to inform practice at the same time as they attempted to explore new (and often unsettling) insights. The tensions involved in promoting uncertainty exploration and ensuring stable support and project completion were not always easily resolved.

There was a clear recognition that the ALNARC research was indeed 'funded' by the Commonwealth and that, this model of government sponsored research was somewhat innovative. There were also clear concerns about the extent to which the particular model adopted by ALNARC was ever able to be fully autonomous or fully funded under the terms and conditions of the funding contracts and the evolving expectations of Directors and 'the field'. The specific features of the model(s) (all of which are described in the following section in more detail) and the roles and relationships which sustained the model(s) seemed to exacerbate some of the very difficulties and criticism publicly voiced about ALNARC, and the expectation that it would 'meet all needs'.

The above issues are critical in shaping the manner in which an 'impact study' frames its questions and draws its conclusions for they go to the heart of the expectations of such a research venture.

In the next section of this report I describe the models in more detail, the roles and relationships that evolved and the common and distinct features within and across the locations.

Roles and relationships

Few Directors, or sponsored researchers for that matter, believed the ALNARC research program was simply a government funded project. Directors referred in various ways to collaborative partnerships, networking relationships and shared roles. At the same time all were in agreement that the central funding source was essential in making the partnerships happen.

The data indicates that the centres build their local networks in relation to the literacy and numeracy field and the state based connections, which are, in the main, already established. A further premise of the Consortium is that research emerges from 'the field', its outcomes are informed by 'the field' and it is designed to contribute back to

'the field'. The notion of 'ivory towered' research is a hard charge to substantiate under these conditions, although it is clear that as the boundaries of adult literacy and numeracy policy, research and practice flow ever outwards, individual people are hard pressed to keep up with increasing groups of 'stakeholders' - to say nothing of the trust relationships that build slowly over time within a state and across increasingly diverse cross-sectoral networks.

One interviewee described this process as 'bringing forth research topics' that were critical issues for the field. Doing this well involved creating a climate of debate, discussion and *literal* contact with people. The latter is something which some Directors suggest is increasingly difficult given the range of demands made of university and training sector employers. Hence leadership and vision is involved but there is also the pragmatic issue of having an understanding of the history of a group and the ways in which its history has helped and hindered the work it aims to do. In many respects *literal contact* with stakeholders provide a richer understanding of the issue and was seen to be necessary to building a shared vision locally and integrating this with a national agenda.

During the 1999-2000 period state based projects activity drove the ALNARC research program. However in 2001 a more integrated national research program emerged as ALNARC Directors took more responsibility for research leadership. Nevertheless even during 1999-2000 this desire to be part of a national picture was evident.

In delivering on the vision locally, various pragmatic requirements came in to play once broad research directions were established:

> It then meant drafting an advertisement that went out over the email ... making sure people got paid, ... we had about 14 applications for four funded projects, they were each $3,000, so it meant coordinating the processes of making a decision as to who would get the funding and which ones would get up, and then keeping in touch with project managers in all of the four locations, and the four mentors that we had working with all those projects. ... keeping it together and then following through ... ensuring that they got their written projects in, ... what the next stage would be, whether or not we'd publish it.

Whilst tasks varied, Directors also developed qualitatively different kinds of relationships with the individual project topics and the sponsored researchers undertaking the projects. At times this was driven by Directors' theoretical and research expertise. Sometimes a 'hands off approach' was appropriate where sponsored researchers were taking up projects as part of a wider post graduate study experience. At other times projects were more closely monitored. One description of support ran a fine line between mentoring and 'hounding' sponsored researchers to complete their projects:

> I had used a lot of money to pay for an admin [person], someone to sort of basically run the admin side of it, and I think that was a successful model, because it meant that there was someone who was the sheep dog, barking at the mentors, barking at the mentorees, and saying 'Where is it at, where have you gone?'

This respondent is conscious of a level of necessary pragmatism involved in mentoring. More often than not Directors and sponsored researchers would complement their sheer delight and excitement about a project with a groan or mutter about how it 'grew like a mushroom', was perpetually unmanageable, and seemed

never to end. In these cases a 'sheep dog' nipping at the heels does not seem like a bad analogy to keep the project under control and ensure there is an end in sight! As one Director noted:

> I guess the expectation of any sponsored research is that you do actually complete a research report which has some rigour, and it's completed on time and within budget!

The focus on Training Package implementation within ALNARC's three-year program has caused much debate in Australian circles and appears regularly across archival records of ALNARC meetings. As previously described, funding was predicated on investigation of 'Training Packages' and the form and manner of these 'flagship' projects evolved in parallel with the evolving consortium leadership, the Training Package trajectory within Australian VET and the local industry-based connections that were promoted in the literacy and numeracy research networks.

In general 'training' projects served as the hub of activity for many state-based centers, albeit not all linked directly to the implementation of 'Training Package' delivery. Generally these projects were undertaken by state coordinators, with significant theoretical and analytical discussion taking place with Directors in that state and advice from a range of people comprising a steering or advisory committee.

This connection to a funding requirement to investigate training is not unreasonable for initial discussions with the funding body had also established that investigating training did not mean producing harmonious stories of Training Package delivery. Nevertheless the nexus between Training Packages, training, literary, numeracy and open-ended investigation in the context of 'research training' was always going to be a difficult nexus.

This issue is also connected with ALNARC's relationship to previous work funded under similar circumstances. Most Directors in the new consortium had had some involvement in the previously funded literacy research network, described by Brindley et al (nd) as follows:

> The primary goal of the networks is to bring together researchers and teachers in the field to assess the state of Australian research, to support practice, to encourage collaboration and dialogue both between researchers and with adult literacy providers and practitioners and to identify and foster research interest and expertise. (Brindley, nd: p. 60).

Directors were clear that ALNARC would build on this work rather than starting from scratch. However, 'building on' does not always have an apparent or visible effect in terms of accumulating knowledge. Of the Tasmanian experience Ian Falk noted:

> the ALRN period was much more practitioner-oriented in terms of the small projects that we let out in this state and there was a greater emphasis on straight professional development of practitioners, as opposed to the research professional development of them. … In Tasmania [we] changed that in the 19990-2000 program, to be much more research-oriented, but that didn't mean there wasn't professional development of practitioners at all.

In fact all of the Directors more or less flagged this shift in focus to a 'more research-oriented' way of guiding and managing the program. This shift was paralleled by the requirement to undertake research about training which would 'hold water' in policy circles, and hence would have some chance of influencing policy conversations about training. This shift to 'doing' research, rather than talking about research or

undertaking professional development in research training saw some staff changes in ALNARC centers as a result of a need for qualitatively different kinds of skills: reflecting a shift from facilitating professional development and administering action research, to doing research in training and community environments.

Hence, ALNARC work in 1999 was caught on the edge of a set of principles, sensible in mind, but difficult to operationalise in practice. These principles can be summarized as follows:

- incorporate practitioners in the research projects;
- provide robust examples of systematic educational enquiry underpinned by an open and exploratory stance;
- ensure these projects respond to the needs of 'the field' (which are in fact theoretical, practical, policy related, political and extraordinarily complex in nature), and
- ensure clear guidance to government agencies funding the overall research agenda.

During this time most Directors had substantive positions as university lecturers and researchers and contractual obligations were negotiated directly with host universities. The location of centers in universities was in fact seen as a strength (and a weakness) of the Consortium model. Directors and funding agents acknowledged the strength of having access to a wide array of research resources: libraries, research data bases, VET research centers within and beyond the state-based university, expertise in research methods and historical analyses and so on. Nevertheless ample negotiation was also required within these sites. In an interview Jean Searle describes the situation in Queensland:

> The Queensland center is located in Griffith University and we had space allocated to it obviously, and so part of [the work] is to negotiate with the university about what they are prepared to provide in kind, and partly to actually hire people to be the research assistants and to then ... facilitate the projects.

Increasingly the tighter connections with university research centers and attendant administrative processes led to the need to clarify ethical approvals required of many of the projects. As explained previously, the 1999-2000 projects were by no means the first to be undertaken by practitioners. On the contrary many ALRN projects had been completed and documented (see for example footnote 1). However in many states these projects were framed as 'professional development' and 'learning about research' rather than 'research'.

To accommodate the broader learning and research focus of previous work, an agreement with the chair of the ethics committee was negotiated in some universities to ensure educators were familiar with the ethics guidelines and protocols and that they understood the importance of ethics and its relation to the conduct of a project. It was the responsibility of the Director to ensure surveys, questionnaires and access to research sites were all arranged in ways which gave colleagues and literacy learners the opportunity to refuse participation, and this was not always easy to 'police'. As time wore on and projects became more structured and research oriented in nature, university ethics committees required full approval to be sought and in these cases the 'workplans' became fleshed out as fully developed ethics protocols which in some cases were vetted by committees with up to 16 'lay' members. These members would

engage across a range of issues from typing mistakes and the appropriate level of language used in an information sheet, to questions of the degree to which the data collection mechanisms would actually deliver on the claims made in the proposals.

Hence over time Directors also negotiated these shifting relationships between the seemingly casual monitoring of learning about research, to much more stringent regulatory procedures which demanded that projects not start until final sign-off had been received from the chair of an ethics committee. In view of comments Directors made about delays in funding these additional steps in the ethical approval process stretched the start-up time of many projects beyond expectations. Yet the requirement to think through each aspect of research methodology was in many cases a useful disciplining exercise resulting in tighter plans around implementation.

Directors described themselves as mentors, drivers, managers, shepherds (and sheep dogs!), editors, and leaders. They are required to meet the needs of many different stakeholders in producing visible outcomes that will improve provision. Managing these diverse sets of relationships, and maintaining a communication process with various stakeholders, each of whom had different expectations about what research was, how it should be conducted and what it should achieve, was a challenge. Additional roles included building alliances with a range of other stakeholders: 'the field'; ethics committees; university management; state literacy and numeracy councils; and the national council. Furthermore documentation to each of these groups also varied in its sophistication and understanding of the rules and regulations governing each relationship.

Features of the sponsored research models

Each of the models developed across the states and territories emerged in response to local conditions, geographic and demographic needs, the skills of each of the Directors and their respective access to resources within their university, and the extent of existing relationships with state literacy (and numeracy) councils and industry training bodies. In addition Directors' personal, professional and political beliefs influenced the kind of theorists introduced, the models developed and the topics Directors were competent to support. In all there were five recurring features across the 'research training' models: building research skills; mentoring; documentation and dissemination; networking; and managing knowledge creation. This was all within the broader intention of building a visible research culture.

Building research skills

Building research skills was influenced by the 'pedagogical' orientation Directors took to 'research training', the history of literacy and numeracy provision in that state and hence the range of interests and orientations of sponsored researchers attracted to the program, and the support available from other university colleagues.

Of the centre Directors interviewed, Western Australia was one of the early states to establish a mentoring program as a central feature within its sponsored research program. Mentoring was "based around the needs of the major stake-holders, ... a very broad cross-section of people that had any vested interest in adult literacy, ... we had schools as well." Within this network the DETYA directive to investigate Training Packages seemed to undermine the capacity of local stakeholders to have an input into what kind of knowledge was created out of the local research centre and as a result led to an impression of *less* capacity building, in their view. Jennie Bickmore-Brand describes the shift from a mentoring to a consultancy model as a move

influenced by a number of factors: the decreasing availability of research staff to mentor novice researchers as a result of 'shrinking education faculties', and subsequently fewer opportunities to offer training workshops on 'how to do research'.

South Australia adopted a similar 'research training and mentoring model' influenced by parallel teaching commitments in an undergraduate research methods course which examined the practical aspects of undertaking a research project for adult educators. The model is described elsewhere (Shore 2001), but underpinning principles included the following:

- 'training' in research methods, approaches and techniques, complemented by a 1:1 mentoring approach;
- dedicated physical space, time and focus for workshops to give priority to the exploration;
- an assumption that contexts vary but there are common features circulating in each context that enable practitioners to talk about and learn from shared conversations about practice across quite different learning contexts;
- complementary readings, perspectives and research techniques to disrupt familiar ways of understanding local practice.

In addition, production of research reports and presentations to wider audiences about the insights that had been gained was designed to disseminate information about the projects and build skills in describing research in progress. Actual research training activities included developing and fine-tuning the (research) question; understanding how this issue emerged in relation to the educator's practice; identifying literature(s) that will help to flesh out the issue, to understand it in new ways and to revisit what seems so familiar; selecting methods of inquiry that shift the investigation to the ground of 'seeking alternatives' rather than 'seeking solutions' (Freeman, 1998), and at the same time keep a 'sense of proportion' (DETYA, 2001a) regarding the size and scope of the projects.

New South Wales adopted a model with similar features to those described above. It included a version of research training collapsed into a single day and supported by mentoring which took the form of 'trouble-shooting' about the project as it proceeded.

Most responses implied there were particular skills to be developed as part of the research training exercise and that these were best learnt in workshops as a preliminary exercise before starting the actual project. Nevertheless, ongoing mentoring was also deemed necessary to ensure that the sponsored researchers received adequate guidance on their projects. Mentoring took different forms, as was to be expected.

Mentoring

All models adopted an approach that combined 'training' and mentoring, but as would be expected this played itself out in different ways according to the dynamics at play in each state. In Victoria academics across a range of collaborating universities were chosen to support projects which were identified through a process of a local forum and a selection committee exercise to identify projects for further funding. John Wilson describes this mentoring support as follows:

> The mentors met with each other and with the coordinator from time to time. The function of these meetings was:

1. to decide who should mentor each project;
2. to review the proposals to consider what kind of support might be needed because the proposals varied in levels of clarity and ambitiousness of what they were trying to attain;
3. to discuss the ethical implications (Copies of the *Australasian Evaluation Society Ethical Guidelines* were distributed to the mentors. Each mentor was asked to fax these on the project team and to discuss the ethical issues with the project team to make sure the projects were conducted in an ethical manner.)
4. to report on the progress and to review the interim reports;
5. to prepare guidelines for final reports;
6. to review the interim reports, and
7. to consider the final reports and to make editorial suggestions for each of them. (Wilson, 2000: p. 66).

While this Victorian model indicates elements of a distance mentoring program, a Director from another state more explicitly described the distance elements as follows:

> we developed a fairly structured program for the people who were given the action research grants. It was a recursive sort of program. In the [metropolitan] area our project officer could actually go and meet on the ground, but we had some that were outside [the city]so we had teleconferences, so we decided we would try to bring people together initially to talk through what was involved in action research, and gave them some models of action research as well, and we also gave them a package which looked at how to develop timelines, how they might wish to report, so they were actually given some information to go away with. About halfway through the projects we again brought them together, also bringing people together within the [city] area with a teleconference link, for them to talk about progress. ... we'd asked them to fill in a progress report, it was only a very basic sort of report, you know what were the aims, where are you up to, are there any issues, but it provided the basis for this meeting, which was very interesting because we wanted them actually to talk through some of the problems that they were having so that the others could hear .... They found that very beneficial, because it wasn't us saying this is right or wrong, but actually trying to encourage them and to think laterally about how they might go about solving some of these issues, and in the meantime contact was made individually with the project coordinator as well, so she would talk to them on a fairly regular basis about how they were going, and similarly when they were coming to draft their reports, they sent drafts in for us to have a look at and comment on, and timelines.

In general, mentoring complements rather than replaces the research training models developed in the state-based centres. Learning through mentoring is also reflected in the activities of the Directors and coordinators involved in managing a research agenda. The data from this project highlights this as a supplementary layer of learning which goes beyond 'simply' implementing small scale state-based projects. In the Northern Territory this took the form of introducing new coordinators to the consortium, advising them on establishing a reference group and a project outline, and mediating negotiations with the funding body regarding the aims and purposes of their study.

Mentoring also exists amongst university based researchers who have varying degrees of visibility themselves within the 'academic research culture'. Many Directors noted that they too were on a learning curve in terms of consolidating literacy and numeracy research as a more explicit agenda in their institutions. Some noted that literacy now had a 'higher profile' in their university and was linked into wider research agendas. This came about through interaction required to enlist support for the projects (for example through hiring assistants, contact with university research offices and submissions to ethics committees). It also developed as a result of collegial conversations within and across university research centers.

Finally the notion of mentoring includes many issues directly related to a small scale project that reflect these wider agendas of 'managing the research'. For many of the sponsored researchers they were new to a whole set of requirements that accompanied 'doing a project'. Here one Director describes the layers of mentoring included in the smaller project work in one of the states:

> the mentoring role shifts in response to what's going on out there, what's happening in here [in the university], and who the researchers are for the year while we're working with them, what the mandate is from the particular funding body. ... I think of mentoring as me learning from them and teaching people about research with all of those bits together. It's not just about me teaching them a small contained project, it's about mentoring in the fullest sense of the word into a culture of research: [including] some things that they might not want to know, like how to do up a budget sheet, how to juggle finances, how to talk the talk of the funding body, so it's a lot of layers.

Mentoring is certainly a function of the mentor's views about what constitutes research. John Wilson notes it is also a function of the extent to which research teams listened to the mentoring 'advice':

> The contracts defined the role of mentor as providing advice and support to the project. At the same time, it was stated in the contracts that responsibility for conduct of the projects rested with the project managers. Mentors therefore had an ambiguous role, as often they have in any mentoring situation. The project managers were not bound to accept the advice of the mentors. In some cases, they didn't accept the advice. In addition, because of the time and pressures involved, mentors were often in a situation where they were asked to agree to a strategy or a draft report at very short notice because there was no time to get into wider considerations and longer discussions (Wilson, 2000: pp. 66-7)

Combining the data from research training and mentoring indicates that the processes were more integrated in some states than others, but overall that mentoring and training produced two related forms of input for the researchers or teams. The research 'training' workshops, where they were offered, were more contained, more manageable in terms of time and input and could often be described in terms of 'learning outcomes' for researchers. On the other hand 'mentoring' was seen as valuable but somewhat more nebulous and more difficult to arrange:

> Yes. It's a very exciting and interesting thing to do, if you can get somebody who's got a bit of time to do it, but if it's something that's on top of somebody's full-time job, it's not worth doing because it won't be done well and the practitioner researchers will sort of probably drop out if they haven't got that support.

Some of these efforts seemed more productive than others in developing a 'visible' outcome. Whilst intentions were good, not all of the strategies were effective in

moving the research agenda along. At times the research training and mentoring worked well. Nevertheless the theme of keeping expectations viable is one that is entangled in many Directors' responses.

Documentation/dissemination

In all sites documentation of the research created much discussion and deliberation, moreover dissemination was problematic. These are not features unique to adult literacy and numeracy research nor are they confined to the projects sponsored by ALNARC (see for example Bowman 2002, Gyngell and Wignall 2002, Nexus Strategic Solutions 2001).

The Consortium built on the previous network in seeking to develop a 'visible research culture'. It was acknowledged that 'research conversations' were already happening, but there was also a sense in which much of the documentation had limited capacity to provide a viable data set for policy making.

Lawrence Stenhouse provides an interesting way in to this dilemma:

> [p]rivate research ... does not count as research. Partly this is because unpublished research does not profit by criticism. Partly, it is because we see research as a community effort and unpublished research is of little use to others. (Stenhouse cited in Stock, 2001: p.104).

One of the difficulties with Stenhouse's position however is that it may be interpreted somewhat unreflexively in terms of the core terms that drive the argument. It could be said to operate from a very conventional view of publishing and a particularly structured view of 'community'. These tensions were apparent when sponsored researchers and Directors produced materials for review within state centers and for response from state and national stakeholders.

A productive feature of some ALNARC reports is their empirical base in the everyday practices of literacy and numeracy integration in work and community. Yet not all people were in agreement on the story to be told of those everyday practices within a single project. One Director describes it this way:

> Committees would get the drafts, and read them, ... and require changes ... so you ended up probably with a bit more sterilized version than an academic paper would normally have done, does that make sense?
>
> So in a normal stake-holder-free scenario ... [research reports] tend to be less sanitized than I think ours are, particularly the Training Packages, because I [was] at meetings where sections and phrases, were just literally chopped out, because they had implications for industry. ... there were several versions of [events].

A number of issues are revealed here, and what is probably most telling is the difficulty of telling a single story about any research encounter, and how the telling of the story is entangled in the roles and relationships readers and writers bring to the task. Under these circumstances networking (potentially) enriches the opportunities for understanding these stories. At the same time it increases the range of voices, stakeholders and partners who might want to influence the final report and potentially rewrite the findings.

The mentoring and documentation process across the various models were often intricately connected rather than separate processes. For some the 'research training'

had a visible program, with an accompanying discourse of order, structure and 'research training'. For others it was:

> fairly haphazard ... some people had to drop out because they weren't being supported by their institutions, other people found it very difficult to write and we didn't have a system to help them really, so we weren't being particularly useful I don't think, as mentors. ... I think they learnt a lot, whether or not they actually wrote it up. ...
>
> One [project] was written up very well. She was somebody who lived in [the city] and I could see her and mentor her quite easily, but she was a good researcher anyway, she would have written this up well without help. ... Two or three of the others were in more remote regions, and it was very hard to do anything except by phone. One dropped out, one learnt a great deal and was very enthusiastic, came to conferences and talked about it *but never wrote about it*, but had taped information, so what we did then was to find somebody else who could actually write up this information.

Documenting projects was also subject to a wide range of criteria across the states, including available funding; start up skills already held by the researchers; the scope and breadth of each project; and the criteria in place by which to assess the final report.

Some states experienced the dilemma of assigning criteria by which to assess the final reports. Was it reasonable to assess outcomes only in terms of the final report produced? To what extent could these reports be considered 'research' writing? Reflections on this stressed that it was not a comment on the researcher as much as it was a reflection on the support within the program and where each of the researchers started from. Increasingly as the project wore on, the impression was that too much was being asked of the mentors guiding the projects and the Directors who may have had limited direct contact with the researchers. As one respondent noted of the mentoring process:

> I was disappointed that we couldn't publish [some reports] ... our expectations were too high, our expectations of the mentors were too high given the very low level of funding that they actually weren't able to travel, they were only able to travel once each to the research sites. And the other very big constraint was the timeframe which had been imposed on us. I think we were asking an impossible amount in terms of writing up the report, according to a particular set of guidelines which we gave them for writing up the report. ...
>
> The other thing was it was never really in a mentoring relationship. It's not the same as having an academic, or formal supervision relationship, where those roles are very, very clearly defined. It's like an informal mate coming, and so people have very strong feelings about their projects, they're very committed to them and so forth. ... in one or two cases, as people tend to do unless it's very clearly set out the other way, they tended to go their own way.

One of the problems identified in this response and raised time and again by practitioners, was the constraints 'the academy' placed on practitioner-research, and it is possible that this response may be read this way. From an insider's point of view many of the Directors' responses suggested there needed to be a different space from which to begin these conversations – where doing and documenting evolve and change as a result of engaging with ideas, rather than separate phases of planning and doing and 'writing up' a project.

The demand on participants to document emerged a number of times as the 'final straw' in the difficulties sponsored researchers experienced, but it also seemed as though it was the final straw for many Directors too:

> A lot of research tended to be case studies, because that's the nature of practitioner research. I did feel that because of the whole complexity of the cultural issues and the lack of preparedness that the reader has for what was being written, a lack of understanding that the reader brings ... I just don't think that [the researchers] were readily able to put the reader into that situation enough, without it being dismissed as 'that was an isolated case'. ... [those researchers], those sort of circumstances, right then and there. I just don't think it ever got to that other level. I think probably the more experienced researcher or academic is [more easily] able to situate the case study within the broader context of the research.

Documentation became a feature of discussions about the usefulness or otherwise of the models with the following comments most notably included in responses:

- sufficient time was rarely built into the project budget to produce different forms and genres of reporting. Clearly there was a need to produce a report for the funding agent but the latitude here was broad and Directors and researchers were left largely to their own devices in this regard;
- repeated consultations with government funding agencies indicated that recommendations were not really a useful summarizing device for reports – especially where those recommendations repeated action already suggested (or rejected) as a way of moving forward. The politics of recommendations created an even sharper edge where emerging researchers struggled with the genre of finishing a report;
- at the same time advisory committees often exerted pressure for recommendations, setting up a dissonance between reporting requirements to the funding body and the committees' views about how to progress a literacy and numeracy research agenda. Committees also wanted a document that would be immediately useful to the field.

During this period of developing visible products from the research activity two issues became apparent: first the documentation itself was in danger of standing in as the public measure of *all* learning achieved during the project. Hence the desire for visibility, whilst understandable, also came to be the means by which many less experienced researchers had their trial by fire, explaining, reporting on, even defending work which was, in effect, work in progress. Some of the more complex learning about documentation and finding one's feet in a project were less easily presented as evidence of growth, in a climate where the researchers were often under close public scrutiny and required to deliver answers in appropriate format to a field which was increasingly regulated by via normative measures of assessment and reporting. Under these conditions of reporting the 'research training'/learning component of the program was reconfigured by the demand to adopt a knowing for certain approach to individual projects. This produced a set of contradictory demands that the sponsored researchers be exploratory and open to change, and at the same time have the skill to convey clearly the research 'question' and preliminary findings.

> the positioning of the teacher-researchers as ... having produced a particular set of understandings and knowledges, ... a kind of authority ... I think there's a bit of a discomfort with being that person who can do the delivery and then field the

> set of questions because it's actually taking on a qualitative role that is different, outside the limits of authority that might have been accepted as a teacher.

Second, and in a related manner, it became increasingly apparent that the finished document was in danger of representing the overall project for those researchers undertaking the projects. Given the demands of other employment and family life, it was hard to see that 'communicating with others', a common literacy social practice cited in many accredited curriculum documents, held less weight in these settings where educators as learners/researchers were struggling with their own 'research literacies'. In some cases the documentation of the work drove the project, and there was less capacity to let go of the demands to produce an outcome, and more urgency to complete a report within required timelines. Hence learning from research seemed to take second place to producing an outcome for ALNARC.

In South Australia additional funding from a Spencer Foundation project enabled an editor to work with the researchers in a very intensive way on a one to one basis, but the process was far from easy. A disadvantage of this was that it collapsed writing feedback into later sections of the project, working against the idea that writing 'up' is a process that starts at the very beginning of any project, rather than acting as a tidying up process. In this case it worked more like a tsunami of feedback washing over practitioner-researchers at the end, and the feedback was not always what they wanted to hear.

One Director put it this way "I'm wondering at what point we interrupt their writing and bring somebody in who has those skills to work with the materials that the practitioner researcher has developed." On the one hand there should be no separation. Yet this response comes from the pragmatic realization that few educators are aware before they begin the process of the 'journey' of documentation that awaits as a researching educator.

Many of these issues have been raised as features of a literacy learning environment, but in this case the 'literacy learners' are sponsored researchers, fine-tuning and honing their own communication skills. To some extent it became apparent that many of the sponsored researchers had less opportunities to develop their own research literacies, but even more so, these literacies were not always in accord with the work literacies of reporting, assessing and auditing that they were increasingly required to perform.

One critical feature of the ALNARC model exacerbated this tension. Repeated discussion with funding bodies emphasized the need to consult with the field, to be connected to a body of stakeholders who had immediate and direct interest in the work and its outcomes. Yet as these consultations wore on it was apparent that stakeholders were not always easy to categorize, as their interests were diverse and their advice varied. It became clear that under the conditions of support available to the practitioner-researchers, no single report would meet the needs of all stakeholders. Juggling needs was something else the models had to build in to the process. One Director put it this way:

> some of the practitioner projects Australia wide have been really thin in terms of their argument, ... you know, heart felt advocacy claims. Now I'd be the first one to say that advocacy and research are strongly connected – research is not neutral, you bring your heart and your passion and your advocacy to it – but if you're going to make a claim and you want someone to listen and be moved to make a response, especially financially, and in terms of time and infrastructure in

> an organization, then the claim has to be strong, it has to be convincing, it's got to have an audience and target that audience and work that claim.

'Working the claim' was a challenge, given the requirement that projects be served by advisory committees and structures that represented 'the field'. Hence networking and local consultation was a central feature of the ALNARC model, and an explicit requirement of reporting back to the funding body. Yet networking and consultation also created a number of pragmatic difficulties at the level of 'research training'.

Networking

Networking was critical in the consortium operations, moreover it tends to build on existing connections and partnerships. Directors are aware though that this can lead to reinforcing current loops and give 'outsiders' the impression of a closed circuit of 'literacy and numeracy' relations. Existing networks took the form of the State literacy (and numeracy) councils, and at times helped to revive or resuscitate previous structures established as part of the National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy (NCAELLS) (ALIO 1991). It was noted however that these structures varied from state to state and were deemed to range from 'very productive' to 'never working anyway'. Other forms of networking included the reference group structure for specific projects which aimed to serve a number of often contradictory purposes: keep the field informed; draw information from the field; provide an opportunity for representation; strategically develop partnerships with state-based providers and agencies where it was difficult to get together otherwise and so on.

Networking can open up conversations across contexts, highlight the progress made by some groups and provide opportunities across contexts, sharing strategies in what might initially seem like disparate and discrete contexts of community and industry.

On the other hand responses suggested networking reinforced sameness, consolidating existing networks but making it difficult for others to break into the network. This is exemplified by some of the later responses to surveys, where a number of people suggest they have 'never heard of ALNARC' and 'don't know what ALNARC is'.

In reading back over the literature these responses to ALNARC as a national research consortium resonated with criticisms of previously funded projects, and the extent to which consultative processes can engage with stakeholders. Brindley et al (nd: p. 31) suggest the problem in the case of their project of identifying research priorities is akin to differences between representation and consultation. Consultation is not always a guarantee of wide representation.

More often than not networking appears to be referenced to an improvement in practice at the pragmatic level. It is guided more by an interest in professional development and 'keeping up with where things are at', and 'knowing what's happening', rather than initiating research conversations. It is this feature of the sponsored program that is most significant for understanding the challenges of building a 'visible research culture'. As noted at the beginning of this section, these impressions from ALNARC Directors set the scene for what might be expected of a sponsored research program. Equally important are the views of stakeholders, to which I now turn.

Stakeholder impressions of ALNARC

The previous section established expectations, roles and relationships and features of the ALNARC sponsored research models emerging *within and across* the states from the point of view of the Directors and coordinators involved in establishing the discursive and material space of a research culture.

In this section a wide range of stakeholder responses are canvassed in relation to the 'impact' of the sponsored research program. Responses for this section are taken from the stakeholder survey, which by nature of its distribution, invited the kind of dissonance reflected in this next section of the report. Responses were invited from all sections of Australian literacy and numeracy provision. Responses to what ALNARC was, what it did, what it should do, and what it could achieve, were diverse, and at times contradictory. Nevertheless, as would be expected from the focus of questions and the material available on ALNARC, *research activity* appeared to be a common thread in nearly all responses. In many cases it appeared that respondents viewed ALNARC's role in a positive light, replicating many of the very things Directors articulate in their descriptions of ALNARC achievements. Not surprisingly positive responses were accompanied by indications of involvement and benefit from the activity undertaken. In sourcing responses from surveys I have identified each respondent by state, role, institutions location and a number indicating the order in which their survey was received. Hence [QldManCom2] indicates a Queensland manager in the community sector whose survey was the second received from that state. Where respondents have not been so identified it is because their survey responses made identification possible and/or may reflect negatively on them.

'Building a research culture' features strongly in terms of political and intellectual dimensions:

> They inquire directly into current literacy and numeracy provision and how it is positioned politically in professional development exploring the implications of research and various publications [NSWPraCom2]

ALNARC is described as providing "access to research theories on literacy" [SAPracTAF5], being "committed to a community of practice" as well as having a "commitment to practice" via the "skills development of practitioners through action research" [NSWOthCom5]. Stakeholders see this taking the form of networking, involving people in formulating the research and dissemination information about research projects. There is repeated reference to contributions to conferences, research presentations and seminars (NSWPraCom2; SAResGov6; NSWResUni3; VicPraCom4; NSWOthGov4; WAResUni3). Specific projects that have 'made a difference' were also cited in responses:

> At the ALNARC conference March 2000 in Melbourne – good practitioner reports e.g. Wangaratta yahoo project; fascinating projects around the country e.g. Ian Falk learning communities, and Queensland project on the motorways … Liz Suda's work into international trends and learning circles is very interesting. [VicPraCom4]

> Implementation of effective online and flexible delivery strategies for people with low level skills [TasManTAF1]

Current projects that have 'made a difference' were set alongside recognition of the cumulative effect of a nationally sponsored research program. Also highlighted was

the importance of noting historical influences and tracking their effects as part of a larger agenda of building a field of professional practice.

> ALNARC (and its predecessors) have a long history – it is through the large range of activities over this time that changes have become evident. [It] would be worth tracking the work of some of the earlier participants in the field research projects to see the kinds of ongoing contributions they have made. Some will have taken on postgraduate research; others taken leadership positions in community organizations; others continued research work and so on [NSWOthCom5]

In this respect therefore some stakeholders concur with Directors in acknowledging a prior history of funding as critical to current gains. Stakeholder views are mixed however, in terms of the overall benefits of the ALNARC sponsored research program. Fifteen of the 33 respondents agreed/strongly agreed that ALNARC had 'developed a visible culture of debate' in their state/territory. Ten respondents were undecided and seven disagreed/strongly disagreed that a culture of debate had been fostered. Cross analysis of these responses with later questions in the survey suggested that one source of 'disagreement/agreement' about the visible profile of the debate was the extent to which discussion reflected the respondents' interests. For example, one respondent who strongly disagreed also believed that ALNARC research had 'no application or connection to community literacy provision that can be ascertained.'

As might be expected the above responses were replicated with regard to *numeracy research*, but to a higher degree. Similarly, a relatively high number of respondents were undecided about whether the program was effective in improving research knowledge about adult literacy and numeracy provision. Nonetheless a small majority of respondents perceived the program to be effective in this regard. These results were replicated in terms of the program's effectiveness in improving the quality of 'practitioner' research within the field. Where respondents thought the program had been particularly effective, their later responses indicated a more thorough knowledge of the details of projects undertaken than those who believed the program was ineffective.

Less positive were the respondents' perceptions that the program had been effective in *disseminating* the results of research projects, with more than half the respondents undecided or in disagreement: "My organization is not affected by this research as it has not got access to it. …I would like to have ready access to the results. I am not always sure where they are or where to access them" [VicPraTAF3]. Similarly "[I] don't know much about it [WAPraTAF1], and "[I] am aware of the knowledge of ALNARC's work in the field but unsure of the flow on effect re quality gains" [SAResGov6]. A more dismissive approach underpinned some responses and reflects Directors' concerns about the 'harmful divide' between theory and practice, research and teaching and university research and field-based knowledge: "I have had a look at the projects and mission statement from the ALNARC consortium website and asked some questions of colleagues. Sounds like navel gazing".

In joining the surfaces of these views with those of Directors responsible for facilitating a research agenda, it is clear that research *management* is not simply a financial skimming exercise, as is often suspected in reviews of budgetary submissions for research tenders. It may even be that this work is best described in terms other than research 'management'.

Summary

In summary there is a sense that ALNARC *promotes and provides* leadership, knowledge and advice to local committees, advice to DEST and important resource support for local seminars and conferences at a time when it is increasingly difficult to access such funds. However, the extent to which this is effective across the diverse range of stakeholders is still a subject for exploration. Publications are an ongoing feature of the development of a visible culture of research, yet responses in this study reflect a wider Australian VET concern with *access* to documentation, *accessibility* of that documentation and its *relevance* given the wide range of immediate and ongoing needs it is expected to meet. In sum, dissemination of outcomes of the sponsored research is still problematic, as is agreement on what is to be achieved, and hence what focus should be taken within the projects, to drive documentation.

All Directors mentioned the link between professional development and a research culture, and yet there were certain tensions in framing the problem this way. There was a belief that a research culture would not just 'materialize', nor would it develop in a vacuum. Conversations were required to kick start it, but there was a strong recognition that many of these conversations were already taking place, and so the challenge was to acknowledge them and understand what was required to enable 'flow-on' effects for provision. Equally, there was an understanding that documenting practice was not a matter of 'just writing things down', for in this study documentation was designed to produce a 'product' to generate debate. Yet debate which suggests the documentation has limited value, suggests a complex and circuitous set of relations in need of disentanglement.

The data on stakeholder impressions reinforce an underlying theme of this study and of wider literature on educational research. These kinds of activities are not simply about undertaking projects to improve understandings of practice. When undertaken in parallel with the consultation, dissemination and debate that accompanied these projects strong views and opinions about the nature of research and its intended outcomes were a seemingly unavoidable component of the process. The projects produced debates about the politics of research as much as they generated discussion about the nature of literacy and numeracy provision (and its politics).

Issues identified by this case

Case study research of the kind offered here follows a structure of problem, context, issues and lessons learned (Creswell 1998: p. 36). The context of the problem is relatively clear, albeit complex: the changing space of adult literacy and numeracy provision in Australia with specific reference to activities in the period 1999-2000 and the need to understand more about the complex dynamics of literary and numeracy teaching, learning, policy and provision. The solution to the problem is clear – a sponsored research strategy activated via federal government funds and implemented nationally. A number of issues emerged from the data gathered to describe and explain the case and these issues are developed more fully in this section, however it also becomes apparent that the 'problem for which sponsored research is the solution' is a rather simplistic way to view the case. In this section of the report I provide a discussion of issues identified by the case (of sponsored research). I then return in the final section of the report to unsettle the notion of a neat case study with clearly defined borders marking out its problem. In doing so the notion of 'sponsored research' as the answer to the problem is also unsettled. First, however, some discussion of issues arising from this 'case'.

Learning outcomes for sponsored researchers

Of the eight researchers who returned surveys, a clear majority of responses rated all aspects of training and support as 'very helpful' or 'quite helpful'. Research *training*, research *mentoring* and research *support* provided three ways of identifying the overall input to the sponsored researchers. Sponsored researcher learning in this program was directly influenced by access to these three kinds of input. Gains for the researchers depended on the elements of the research training models they were exposed to, the resources they received, and the start up research capacity, they had already developed. Reflections on their learning covered three key areas:

1. specific changes they would make if they undertook the project again, including apparent contradictions in responses unless a more detailed knowledge of their project or support structures was available;
2. changes they would make once the project had been completed; and
3. responses that dwelt on more complex relationships within the project.

When asked about the two most useful activities, respondents reinforced the need for practical activities including, mentoring, editing and research techniques. Also, importantly, adequate funding to cover a range of budget items from paid research time, replacement teaching time, buying in of expertise and purchasing research resources such as software or publications of specific forms of research.

When asked to reflect on the overall learning, many responses moved quickly to *suggest practical changes* to aspects of the research process:

> I would have been more systematic in how I organized the data and collated the bibliography. Organizational skills are essential for good research. I probably should have started writing sooner also [VicResGov1]

Other responses *seemed contradictory* unless read in the context of the actual project being completed. For example one respondent claimed "I would have made the project smaller" [SAPraRTO1] whilst another would have used a "larger sample group" [WAManCom1].

Respondents listed a number of additional outcomes that, although not necessarily an aim of a funding body, are clearly about improving the capacity of a field to engage in systematic enquiry. Such outcomes included:

- promoting debate across literacy and numeracy sites of practice [WAOthTAF2];
- exposing practitioners to the wide range of options available for supporting literacy and numeracy learners with the latest communications technology [TASManTAF1;
- enabling an organization to encourage new researchers to the field [NSWOthCom5];
- promoting positive outcomes by disseminating research results "in the field", a strategy which enabled the researcher to "posture our organization more realistically and effectively in terms of our delivery with the [new] knowledge [NSWPraCom2].

Other favourable developments were framed as 'practical assistance', but the persistent theme of discussion and networking were repeatedly foregrounded:

> The National Reporting System projects supported by ALNARC were of practical assistance. The networking & discussions around the production of exemplars gave opportunity for discussions around the NRS assessment and good practice. Rosemary Wood's [2001] paper was published in *Literacy Link* and posed questions which hopefully others may pick up and may lead to change in the way the DETYA literacy and numeracy program uses the NRS. [SAPraRTO3]

Interestingly this project (Wood 2001) was not technically one of the sponsored projects from the ALNARC 1999-2000 project. Nevertheless, it came under the umbrella of ALNARC sponsored research. This 'confusion' provides an example of the extent to which the field collapses a range of activities under the umbrella of the 'ALNARC sponsored research program', with little need to know the specifics of the funding source. Rather both sources of funding in this instance provided practitioners with the latitude to explore practice, develop conversations and build capacity across a number of private providers. Similarly, both projects produced outcomes beneficial to the respondent.

Other benefits of the program included the following:

- increased ability to be reflexive in terms of one's teaching practices;
- opportunities to discuss literacy and numeracy issues;
- promotion of 'debate within the broader field about literacy and numeracy and training packages and [the] LANT program';
- enabling practitioners to become exposed to 'the wide range of options available for supporting literacy and numeracy learners with the latest communication technology';
- increased knowledge - provision of resources to conduct research in line with personal research interests;
- enabling one to develop recommendations for change based on observation and research; research opportunities which may improve practice;

- a strengthening of VET research culture – 'linked research to professional development to support the delivery of literacy and numeracy'; enabling participants to exchange ideas and experiences through the development of networks with practitioners and others in the field;
- professional development;
- the provision of a gateway to further study, etc.

Deeper introspection about *learning* that moved beyond the pragmatic exploration of the projects was also apparent. These kinds of responses reflected thoughtfulness about what had been learned about 'knowledge production' as a result of completing the project. Once again these responses also needed to be contextualised in terms of the model of support, prior research training experience and support from the organization:

> The ethics approval, while instructional, is focused on the medical model which makes for extreme difficulty in advocating the voice of the clients of literacy programs because of risks run in intruding on the participants' privacy. It does explain why current reports skirt around the voice of clients [VicResGov2]

> It made me focus on my current clientele and adjust my teaching practice and influence others to consider the positives on reflecting on the needs of the client and their practice. I discovered and became involved in the local community organization network who dealt with other aspects of my clients lives which continues to be a valuable resource base for me in my practice and delivery [SAPraTAF4]

> I would value the process more and not become focused on the 'Is this the right way?' and the 'How much more time do I have?' of it all [SAPraTAF2]

The following responses are reflective of three clear categories of change evident across the wider body of researcher responses: change to practice (P), change to program operations (O), and change in terms of the knowledge base informing decisions about provision (K):

> it made me more reflective and caused me to question what I was doing and how it related to the changes in literacy delivery due to the commencement of training packages [TasPraTAF1] (P)

> Yes, we have a better delivery of additional tutorial assistance to students on trainee-ships. I have argued strongly that this delivery occur through the adult literacy program and not be taken over by another TAFE program. It is still with us at the moment [TasPraTAF1] (O)

> Yes, in the sense that it exposed in a factual way something that we knew was happening intuitively. This has led to a change in policy within our section which has helped bring in a bit of money for more teaching resources [NSWPraTAF1] (K)

> yes – my colleagues saw the links between health and other issues and literacy research [VicResGov2] (K)

Developing a *wider knowledge base about provision* had two dimensions. On the one hand it helped to clarify what people were in a sense 'intuitively' aware of, the kind of knowledge built from experience and close contact with a learning setting (one of three components of knowledge included under the umbrella of 'working knowledge') (DETYA, 2001a). On the other hand, a wider knowledge base about provision helped set up the networking structures and communities of practice that encouraged the

researchers to 'know differently' about teaching and learning. The latter is something which is not always possible within the confines of induction programs; nor is this always possible within-house staff development designed to meet the needs of a particular organizational way of seeing and being in the world.

One practitioner described it this way: "I personally benefited by participating in a research project – it removed me from my niche, extending my boundaries". Other researchers responded in similar ways, confirming the importance of *conversation* as a critical entry point for knowing differently:

> Yes. It gave people the opportunity to talk, both formally and informally about their practice. The formal discussions took place in a brainstorming session. The informal discussions were sharing stories about classroom incidents [SAPraRTO1]

> Yes. Colleagues were either surprised and a little skeptical of the time, energy and effort required or very supportive [SAPraTAF2]

These responses are reflective of the growing interest in documenting learning communities and communities of practice, whereby educators are not concerned simply with *problem solving*. In these kinds of educational learning communities educators often experience a fundamental shift in the way they see, understand and feel about their work. There are differences of opinion about the extent to which this 'paradigm shift' can operate within a corporate climate required to meet the goals of an educational business, and at the same time be primarily guided by concerns for social justice. More than once sponsored researchers expressed concerns about the challenges they faced in keeping social justice on the agenda *and* developing a 'productive' outcome for their institution. More often than not productivity was set in the context of whether a program, strategy or venture would contribute economically to the organisation's goals: Would it count as training hours? Would it return a profit to the educational provider? Would it produce an educational product that could be utilized in marketing or funding the organisation's activities? Would it form the basis for a new program to generate student hours?

Within the small sample of eight respondents, all indicated that their involvement in the ALNARC sponsored research program had increased *their* capacity in all the categories outlined in the survey viz.: teaching, articulating research agendas, articulating provision, doing research, actually completing a research project, disseminating information about that research, developing report writing and documentation skills and so on. Most positive gains were related to developing various tangible research practices and skills.

One category receiving less positive response was the sponsored researchers' perceived capacity to compare their organization's effectiveness with other forms of 'literacy' provision. In this case, half the respondents were undecided or in disagreement with the view that they could now compare their organization with other providers. This suggests that, where mentoring models provided opportunities to come together and discuss research, these conversations did not appear to have an effect on the sponsored researchers' ability to compare their organization's literacy and numeracy provision with other organizations.

In terms of the project contributing to improvements in teaching, the responses varied. Some respondents were not able to readily identify the links between the gains they were perceived to have made from their involvement in the program and their current roles and responsibilities. The reasons for this were varied. For example, a TAFE

practitioner suggests involvement "wasn't related to student learning in a practical sense". However, the same respondent believed that involvement in the project "was beneficial":

> It increase[d] my standing professionally and has also helped my section earn more money ... I believe that, as a result of this, I became more respected within the section (not as a teacher but as someone who had other things to contribute.) I believe this has led to my improved work conditions [NSWPraTAF1]

Even more convincing was a manager in the community sector who states that their involvement precipitated "immediate and on going changes to the programs". More generally though there was uncertainty about improved provision because changes in employment affected their capacity to produce flow-on effects as teachers:

> [I] do not have the role of literacy practitioner currently [VicResGov2]

> No – I changed teaching positions to deliver competency-based training where literacy is NOT considered a valid component of my teaching. That's not to say that I don't slip in a spot of literacy here'n'there anyway! [SAPraTAF2]

Others were more ambivalent about flow-on benefits:

> Indirectly yes, but I haven't had the opportunity to put some things into practice as I am mostly managing and researching at the moment [VicResGov1]

> Not sure yet! It certainly gave me the opportunity to reflect on my practice and articulate it to others who are not in the field [SAPraRTO1]

Although not articulated, there appeared to be a 'silent' consciousness that these gains enabled a reflexivity which has in turn contributed to their professional development.

Whilst there were doubts about the extent to which the research translated into efficiency outcomes for the researchers' organizations, overall, there was a sense that the program had, at the very least, enabled a research consciousness, if not a solid capacity to engage in further research or transfer the learning from the project to a visible improvement in teaching.

These responses are suggestive of the claim that 'meta-narratives about practice' - that is practitioners' capacity to talk about their teaching, articulate it, and relate it to other theories of learning, management and change - are part of a process of educational change which may initiate changes in provision. If we are to believe at one level that introducing new discourses of teaching and learning provides the space in which educators can think and talk about practice, and in doing so better understand and improve teaching and learning, then such projects provide an important framework for ongoing professional development for literacy and numeracy practitioners. Even so, these claims are located within an environment of training which is increasingly wary of broad based declarations of progress that are not backed up by tangible evidence of improvement. Funding such claims via the mechanism of sponsored research is becoming increasingly difficult. More to the point, what tangibles might we bring into play to provide evidence of the success of such a program, when benefits are not always able to be applied in the learning setting?

Funding matters

Reflections on research support varied, and in many respects were a function of the variety of models adopted in each state/territory as much as they were about changes each state made in response to local pressures, opportunities and constraints.

Directors commented that the annual funding cycle created many difficult barriers:

> we would be probably told around about December, that we were going to get money for the next year. ... so then we'd advertise and call for expressions of interest over the summer period, and we'd have to wait until basically mid-way through February if not the end of February, before closing date for expressions of interest, just purely because the teaching force is on holidays, and that meant that basically we'd have a forum or a seminar on how to do research in around about March, and that would mean that the research would not really actually start to happen until about April, and then you're talking about a final report needing to be given.

As financial accounting practices in the host institutions were rendered increasingly accountable, Directors found that their capacity to get an early start on the projects was delayed until funds were actually lodged with an institutional account. In fact, many respondents complained that lack of time and funding had been an impediment to the research process.

> The funding was only minimal and we were required to supplement the funds considerably to achieve a reasonable outcome [TasManTAF1]

> It's always hard because you have to do it on, you know, you do it on top of your work, you're not supported from a manager's point of view, you're certainly not supported financially. You're often doing that stuff, you know the editing and the fine-combing ... after hours and on weekends, on top of your normal workload.

Such comments reflect concerns that some of the Directors expressed, that too much was expected of the sponsored researchers (regardless of the size of the salary package or funding grant) in relation to the scope of their projects, documentation, timelines and the standards of presentation and analysis.

Other difficulties also emerged as a result of the resources available locally: one sponsored researcher found it difficult to meet the project commitments because her work was influenced by staffing shortages in her institution; others noted that "uncertainty about funding and consequent short timelines for completion" acted as overall barriers [QueRes4].

A response from one member of the community sector exemplifies the general train of thought with regard to funding arrangements:

> New researchers have to learn to design research, undertake research and write about their research. This takes practice. The ALNARC funds and publications provide relatively safe places for such people to develop these skills.

This is not a particularly common lens for viewing participation in the program. Others believed it was "all to hard for too little profit". A different set of responses indicate some confusion about the power and influence available to individual people or the Consortium in terms of its capacity to influence government funding priorities:

> if the level of funding for community literacy is a direct result of research and policy development ... and it has come from ALNARC, then it has been disastrous

> If the ... $'s for Adult Literacy is a direct result of ALNARC sponsored research into policy directions then we have seen a decrease in funding in actual dollars by about 50% and in real terms over the last 5 years of about 60 to 70%. If we can make this extrapolation, and this is the case then it has been unhelpful. In [our state] its JOBS, JOBS, JOBS not education for adults. Maybe sponsored

> research should be conducted by the real stakeholders in adult literacy, those that actually deliver training to real customers.

The issues identified under the heading of 'funding matters' are hard to disentangle from wider beliefs about the aims and purposes of research. In this respect the issues are not new. Brindley *et al* claimed that high quality research requires "quality assurance mechanisms to ensure research projects meet high professional and technical standards" (nd: p. 6). This is a commendable goal, but tends to overlook the disparities between the experiences of sponsored researchers and provider organizations involved in these research projects; demographics of each of the states and territories; and the increasingly common phenomenon of contracted, and casualised staff which promotes the view of research as employment. Quality assurance mechanisms cannot be dismissed in this work, yet very few funded research projects can lay claim to assurances of 'quality employment' under the conditions noted above.

Support

Whilst most respondents and some stakeholders recognized the problems with funding, money was not the only issue when it came to additional support for the projects. Researchers wanted 'more' in terms of direct assistance with their research, for example "more face to face meetings and brainstorming sessions to keep developing our ideas", and "more training on dealing with research methodology".

For many the reasons for the dissatisfaction with support were reduced to *time and monetary constraints*. However, researchers also raised the issue of how time and money influenced the kind of support they could receive.

Experiences of support were dependent on the assumptions and models made about prior research experience. One researcher felt she received very little support from ALNARC, but then she also had some research training from a Master of Education degree and felt that she received reasonable level of support for the kind of project she completed, and the training she already had. Others thought the support was "pretty fair. In terms of time, the money didn't cover it but then I didn't expect it to and I was really grateful to receive anything. It was a good experience for me" (NSWPraTAF1].

Support was also a function of the time and attention ALNARC staff, in particular the Directors, could afford to quarantine for the mentoring – a labor intensive process at any time and never delivered in a vacuum:

> Research is hard to do and good support is important. I think the problem is that ALNARC staff are also involved in other delivery at university and it is difficult to find common free time to discuss ideas. ... But, I am pleased that we completed the project (TasPraTAFE1]

At times the term 'support' was collapsed into mentoring, at other times respondents were clear that 'support' meant financial support and this was equally critical in undertaking the project. For one researcher "more assistance with travel expenses related to air travel (I was in an isolated community) to attend workshops" would have been helpful: "... perhaps even having the mentors come to the researcher and view them in their own environment" (SAPraTAF2]. Had this person been exposed to the Queensland model of telephone mentoring for rural participants, they may well have experienced a more appropriate level of support than they did through the 'research training model' offered in South Australia.

Researcher responses resonate with Directors' responses concerning the extent to which they contributed time and resources beyond the initial funding budget. A recurring feature of responses was that researchers did not expect the project to be fully funded: "I was really grateful to receive anything. It was a good experience for me".

Concurrently there was clear evidence that the researchers were unaware at times of just how much they would have to contribute from their own resources, that in a sense they did not quite know what they were getting in to. One of the respondents invokes the frustration many feel near the end of a project when it seems there is no end to the changes required to meet the requirements of the funding body, or for that matter the standards expected by an advisory committee or state Director.

> It was very easy for people to say three-quarters of the way through that it was getting tough and deadlines were getting tight, to say 'Chuck it, chuck it, we don't want to be bothered with this because it's extra on top of what we're doing already'. So yes, there was certainly some learning there.

Two issues emerged here. On the one hand the fact that so many people participated in projects and had to commit significant amounts of their own time, energy and personal resources, suggests that educators are already taking responsibility for their own professional development and learning as researchers. On the other, we heard more than once from people who were stretched to breaking point. The frustration here is not so much with the research itself, but with the documentation produced from the projects; the need to satisfy a number of diverse and often contradictory audiences; and the demands this placed on people who were often employed in a casual position, at times across two or three institutions, with little promise of ongoing work.

Building capacity

In recent research Terri Seddon (2001) provided an analysis of 'capacity building' and change across a number of VET sites. Previous sections of this report have pointed to the extent to which universities, government agencies, providers and individual teachers contributed to the program, more often than not in ways far outstripping the financial and professional returns. 'Impact' is therefore usefully analyzed from this perspective, that is, the extent to which capacity building was enabled during the period under review.

With regard to improving collaboration between organizations, only 14 of the 33 stakeholder respondents agreed that their involvement in the projects had achieved this. However, 21 of the 33 respondents agreed that their participation had improved *networking at the level of sharing information and resources with* other trainers/educators. In each case two people strongly disagreed with the view that collaboration and networking were improved. One respondent suggests that ALNARC actually undermined capacity by expecting too much.

> It was poorly funded and required labor arrangements that would really be quite unacceptable anywhere else. It has been very poorly managed from start to finish. The process by which it was carried out has stressed rather than added to the field. The overall perception it has left is that ALNARC creates a lot of hard work and trouble for little to no reward.

Of the very same project another respondent said:

> Well we certainly have a research document in terms of outcomes. ... it is going to be published. That's ... a real achievement for us, ... it's been really well received, it is quality research, and it is going to be published, ... not all of ALNARC research reports that are produced as part of ALNARC funded research get to that point, to be actually produced, so we're very proud of that.

There is no way to reconcile these two views, or for that matter, to suggest that they are generalisable to the whole of the ALNARC sponsored research program. Like many of the responses the substantive focus depends on who you are, where you sit, where you start, and where you are. But these dissonances do point to an interesting feature of 'capacity' building through sponsored research. ALNARC itself is co-implicated in labour processes that build its own capacity, at the same time as there is an explicit intention to build a research culture and presumably the skills of other researchers. As other researchers have pointed out, there are differential benefits to people involved in research (cf. Hey 2001), and it seems that some sponsored researchers and indeed Directors received significant boosts to their own professional standing as a result of being involved in the research.

Not surprisingly, some respondents viewed this as a problem, suggesting that benefits were 'personal' and that the program allowed people to 'conduct research in line with personal interests'. Furthermore there was a perception that the 'most impact [was] on the few people who were involved in the research - professional development role [but] no great impact on the wider field' [NSWResUni3]. These issues are especially problematic in light of a sense of diminishing employment opportunities in the field and the implicit belief that the sponsored research program is in fact a source of employment and career development. Yet as noted previously the funding conditions operating during 1999-2000 were by no means always amenable to quality employment.

In terms of overall benefits of the program, other respondents saw 'no positive outcomes' or 'no positive outcomes that we are aware of' or 'no application or connection to community literacy provision that can be ascertained.' The observation that connections across literacy and numeracy provision were produced out of the ALNARC research appears like many other observations to be an effect of localized practice, hence when it is good it is very very good, but when it isn't ...

Despite this it is important to understand the 'no positive outcomes' story, as much as it is important to celebrate the personal and professional gains experienced by the researchers. For some respondents, the fact that the outcomes 'seemed irrelevant and obvious' [VicManOth5], is critical to the ongoing development and renewal of a literacy and numeracy profession. My aim here is not to make more of these 'negative' comments than is necessary, in view of the fact that they are balanced with other more positive support for the program. Nevertheless they signify something of the diversity of expectations a sponsored program produces and the challenges inherent in the different processes of dissemination, diffusion and utlization of research outcomes (DETYA 2001a). For some, the weakness in some ALNARC projects was precisely that the outcomes were 'obvious' ... 'we have known this for some time'. For others in the field outcomes of the project are new, exciting, informative, enabling them to build on their practice. These insights are not only a reflection of the research and its substantive focus. They are also a reflection of the changing nature of a field which is experiencing significant shifts in the extent of

change, deregulation of tendering processes, casualisation of the workforce, and the significant questions about succession planning that these issues raise. What's more they present significant challenges for understanding what is needed to meet this diverse range of expectations.

Data from each state and territory point to the challenge of sustaining a critical mass of people who are able to take up a research project with little need for prior preparation. As respondents from the Northern Territory note, practitioners are always moving on. In other, more densely populated places, high turnover of staff and casual staff with limited access to ongoing professional development, face similar difficulties. For one manager the project "opened up research opportunities for me and my colleagues so that we can link research to improve our practices" [SAManTAF8]. For this respondent there was no distinction between research and professional development, the project "strengthened [our] VET research culture [and] linked research to professional development to support the delivery of literacy and numeracy".

Summary

At the risk of stating the obvious, sponsored adult literacy and numeracy research within the wider vocational education and training agenda is not highly visible. Unlike a number of other avenues for funding professional development, the projects described here were largely funded by ALNARC funds and the commitment of individual researchers. There was no requirement that organizations contribute, although there were significant disparities in the scope of in-kind contributions made to the projects. On the other hand, some researchers suggested the fact that they are doing 'open ended research' with traditionally marginalized students in their organizations only served to marginalize them even more, and there was little likelihood of receiving any support from their organizations.

In many projects a tension emerged between the kind of budgetary processes that frame a tender for provision and those budgetary processes which parallel the thinking work associated with research. Documentation in these projects was rarely achieved within the 'two week time frame' often allotted in the initial proposals. Other research (Brown and Roberts 2000) indicates it may be naïve to even think that this is possible.

In addition there is an emerging problem of accountability in provider organizations that links productivity to student hours in ways which are incommensurable with 'research hours'. This should not be read as a blanket request for research to be funded in an open-ended fashion. Rather, the work of these sponsored researchers points to a different kind of relationship to the work of documentation in research and teaching: neither more nor less valuable, but qualitatively different in kind in the 'thinking work' involved.

In reviewing literature for this project, documentation from the ANTA funded *Reframing the Future* project was useful in teasing out the similarities and differences of the ALNARC sponsored research program (as a professional development exercise) and other ANTA funded projects (Mitchell, Henry & Young, 2001; Mitchell & Young, 2001; Mitchell, Wood & Young, 2001; Mitchell & Wood, 2001). It is clear from the outset that this latter material is designed to make a change in organizational practice. The researchers undertaking ALNARC projects did not expect that kind of change, that kind of organizational support, nor that kind of timeline. Their relationship to knowledge production was of a different order. The general tenor of

Reframing the Future documentation suggests this may in fact be a major difference between the projects. For example, Mitchell, Henry and Young (2001:29) note that "work based learning is about improving work, not learning for its own sake". Yet the projects investigated here were supported in the main by research mentoring and training models that were not based on such either/or distinctions. The wider literature on work based learning, canvassed at some length in Mitchell, Henry and Young (2001) does remind us that learning is a process of creating knowledge (see also DETYA 2001a), and this was a central feature of the models offered. My point here is that practitioners need a range of opportunities to develop greater reflection on practice, and that not all professional development should be designed with the ALNARC model of sponsored research.

The dominant theme in responses from sponsored researchers was that they experienced a process of learning and were committed to it beyond the parameters of the support provided. For one Director the program worked because of the people involved "the motivation, the desire, the will, for people to make it successful". Interestingly this response went on to add that another critical factor was the risks taken by the sponsors: that they are actually going to fund people to do the research in the first place, and equally that all people in the program 'put in more than they'd been paid for'. This reflects the themes emerging from Directors' responses and an implicit message deriving from the range of stakeholder responses in attempting to meet all needs the program may in fact be undermining its capacity to make a difference in a more focused and sharply defined way.

One of the key assumptions of practitioner-research is that it improves teaching (Anderson et. al 1994; Cochran-Smith 2000; Stock 2001). Whilst responses to this section of the survey were generally positive, it seemed that there was a gap between acquired knowledge of research skills and processes, and *significant* gains to everyday teaching practice. In other words, there was evidence of a growing reflexivity in their work, but for many this reflexivity could not be clearly negotiated within a framework of consensual employer/employee needs (cf. Mitchell, Henry & Young, 2001). Instead, many practitioners adopted a pose favoured by Maxine Green (cited in Anderson et al., 1994: p. 44) which focuses more on 'making it meaningful'. This approach recognizes that research doesn't always connect immediately to improved teaching practice, but that doesn't mean it is not useful work to be done, nor that it will not improve provision in the future. Several different questions are useful here: What kind of outcomes can be expected from such a program? or alternatively What can be achieved in such a program given the range of constraints on all participants and the diverse expectations of stakeholders?

A major thrust of the ALNARC sponsored research program was to engender visibility for a field deemed to be marginal in terms of its research impact in the academy, its research experience in the field and its capacity to influence wider sectors of industry and vocational training decision making. In seeking to enhance visibility, the Consortium chose an obvious strategy of increasing the range and number of research documents that reflected activity, yet in doing this it also created a problem. Writers such as Marilyn Strathern (2000) and Nancy Jackson (2000) offer different insights on visibility but their basic premise is the same: the increasing levels of documentation and practice involved in naming and defining fields of educational practice are problematic. These efforts constitute a field at the very same time as that field is trying to reinvent itself as something more than a service provider to the larger vocational education and training system.

Analysis of the responses across field stakeholders, sponsored researchers and ALNARC Directors resonates with a concern often raised in the field. Literacy and numeracy practice are ubiquitous. At times literacy and numeracy practice as 'problem' (more often described as 'deficit') is a very hard tag to shake. The ALNARC sponsored research program seems to have been influenced by the all encompassing nature of 'the problem'. The structure of the research program, the questions (driven by funding body concerns) and field based input via Directors and other stakeholders has meant it has been difficult to "keep a sense of proportion" (DETYA 2001a: 65) about what such a program can achieve. As many literacy and numeracy educators know, these are not unfamiliar claims.

Keeping a sense of proportion: sponsored research as a change strategy

The ALNARC 1999-2000 sponsored research program did not develop in a vacuum. Rather, it was shaped by a set of prior conversations and expectations about research and a set of inscribed principles that have driven many forms of literacy and numeracy *provision:* it needed to be locally based, locally driven, practitioner oriented, educationally driven, and with programs geared towards the goal of building a body of situated knowledge and research practices about literacy and numeracy in Australia.

The underpinning claims for socially constructed knowledge embedded in the above principles are not all that new as the following extract shows:

> Tuberculosis, Lewontin (1991) points out, was a disease extremely common in sweatshops and factories of the nineteenth century, and ... the upper classes (p. 42). Therefore, he argues, "we might be justified in claiming that the cause of tuberculosis is unregulated industrial capitalism, and if we did away with that system of social organization, we would not need to worry about the tubercle bacillus (p. 42)" (Grant and Wieczorek, 2000: pp. 914-915).

Whilst this example may seem extreme (to some) it highlights the socially constructed nature of knowledge in a very concrete way. In this study participants across the three groups had various predispositions to 'really useful knowledge' and the manner in which it might be put to use in order to improve literacy and numeracy provision in Australia. These predispositions are, to some extent, reflected in the work of Weiss, cited as part of a larger extract from a recent DETYA study *The Impact of Educational Research*:

> [Working knowledge is] ... [t]the organized body of knowledge that administrators use spontaneously in their work. It includes the entire array of beliefs, assumptions, interests and experiences that influence the behavior of individuals at work. It also includes science knowledge. The term working as used here, has two meanings. First, it means that this is a special domain of knowledge that is relevant to one's job. Second, it means that the knowledge itself is tentative, subject to change as the worker encounters new situations or new evidence. (Weiss, 1980 cited in DETYA, 2001a: p. 52)

Weiss' kind of working knowledge fits well with the aims and intentions of a range of research training and mentoring models exemplified in the ALNARC research program. These models attempted to generate what McInnis (2001: p. 37) calls a 'cultivating climate'

> where personal potential and preferences are balanced against real world challenges. ... demands for work are balanced against the importance of support and recognition of the self. To know oneself is important if rational choices are to be made. Both cooperation and individualism are important in the cultivating climate. In sum, the product of a cultivating climate is ... [one] who is productive in work, participates in the life of the university, and emerges as a self-knowing individual.

When viewed from this perspective, building a culture of research recognizes and tries to avoid the problems associated with modularization of knowledge (Gallagher in McInnis, 2002: p.39), especially knowledge concerned with how knowledge about literacy teaching and learning is produced. To reiterate, while it is problematic to

compare literacy with models of disease eradication, I believe it is it is useful to draw comparisons between the process of knowledge production about diseases and other social phenomena and the manner in which knowledge is produced about literacy and numeracy teaching and learning. However many challenges still exist. A research training process that does not disaggregate learning, that does not literally modularise and train, prompts certain pragmatic questions:

- What are the limits of such a process?
- How long should it last for particular local cohorts?
- What national timescale can be put on such a program?
- What kind of outcomes are reasonable?
- What kind of outcomes are viable?
- What impacts are likely and what criteria are to be used for assessment?

Such questions are not easy to negotiate when stakeholders bring diverse understandings of the use and value of knowledge to the table. If knowledge is never neutral in literacy, then why would we not acknowledge that research about that knowledge is unlikely to be neutral either? In terms of this study respondents provided some clear exemplars of how they see 'working knowledge' evolving in such projects:

- as *operational* in terms of program structures;
- as *practical* in terms of how they take up ideas in classroom contexts;
- as *creating new understandings* about their knowledge base.

A critical mass of colleagues and organizational support are both important - as is research which has 'curiosity' value (DETYA, 2001a) research which may have immediate use value. This involves situating literacy and numeracy research within discourses of professional development and a range of diverse and often paradoxical sponsored research discourses, none of which are necessarily congruent. In a sense the sponsored research program described here is caught on the fence between a market driven economy and knowledge creation; between the learner and the employee (McInnis 2002, p. 36); between ideas of the 'use' value, of knowledge and the value of knowledge creation as a meaning making exercise. The latter enables notions of 'cooperation' and 'individualism' (cf. McInnis 2001) to be negotiated on a terrain which attempts to recognize the 'dynamic conservatism' (Anderson et al., 1994) of educational institutions.

The above discussion concerns the weighting given to various participant dispositions towards the knowledge defined as the desired outcome of a sponsored research program. During this study other issues emerged which impact on the way in which impact is analyzed.

The literature on workplace learning, practitioner-research and other forms of professional development is in agreement about one thing: 'high-skilled' practitioners are required to meet the challenges of adult literacy and numeracy provision in contemporary times. Practitioners need diverse forms of professional development, and at the risk of invoking counter-productive binaries, these forms of professional development will involve negotiating and supporting qualitatively different kinds of thinking work. As Lyn Yates notes, we need research which

> identifies problems with approaches that are the current enthusiasm and which challenges them, or research which produces new ways of thinking about and seeing issues; or research which tests models of learning or teaching or organization in some way; or research that engages with major discussions going on in the disciplines outside education can also be useful. (Yates, 1999: p. 7).

It is very difficult to do this kind of research however, given the time constraints, the documentation demands, and the extent to which current professional development opportunities are being eroded for many practitioners. This study provides some options for research that seeks to locate the 'foundation' knowledge base about literacy and numeracy provision with and in the field. However, more is needed than a listing of the models which can be adopted as forms of professional support.

Knowledge creation does not exist in a vacuum. It is indeed a social practice dependent on many forms of literacy and numeracy. Hence naming models is only one aspect of understanding when and how professional support works and when it doesn't. Equally important is knowledge of how the models of sponsored research themselves are deeply implicated in assumptions about knowledge and its 'use value'.

As Donald Freeman (1998) notes there is a pervasive assumption that teachers do not generate knowledge about practice, rather they glean ideas from those researchers who create knowledge about their practice. Teachers then apply this knowledge in their workplaces. Whilst reflection on practice is a necessary part of an educator's work, the changing conditions of 'classrooms' require literacy and numeracy educators and trainers to be much more proactive than this. There is also ample evidence from the ALNARC sponsored projects (and previous ALRN projects) that many adult literacy and numeracy practitioners are already engaged in producing knowledge about their educational contexts.

A cursory analysis of the shifts in research from ALRN to ALNARC provides ample evidence of ALNARC's shift to a model of more "systematic educational enquiry" (DETYA, 2001a: p. 65). Moreover these changes are not happening in isolation. A number of government sponsored programs (*Reframing the Future, ANTA Innovative Projects,* and the *Adult Literacy National Project)* are set within a complex set of relations about producing knowledge about Australian vocational education and training and literacy/numeracy relations. The ALNARC model of sponsored research resonates with Bob Lingard's view of the need for "a very broad definition of educational research and … a wide interpretation of the concept of impact" (Lingard, 1999: p.1). Living with this view is made more comfortable by being predisposed to an understanding of knowledge which is at once socially constructed and in flux, embedded in relations of power and also implicated in networks of knowledge creation diffusion and utilization, which are dependent on rich understandings of context. As Jane Kenway notes

> [I]n essence the many issues associated with educational research arise from perennial debates about knowledge - what it is, how is it best produced, who should produce, validate and distribute it, on what grounds, according to what values and in whose interests? Further, as for most professional faculties, pressing questions for Education faculties are 'what is useful knowledge, how is it best produced, by whom and to what ends? Associated questions arise here about how best to be relevant and useful to the education profession, to education systems and students without necessarily adopting a purely instrumental view of knowledge. (Kenway forthcoming).

At one level it is appropriate to suggest the aim of such a program is better learning for all stakeholders! It is therefore important to ask what place a sponsored research program has in an overall strategy that caters for professional development, knowledge creation and professional renewal in a field that is central to and underpins all other forms of vocational training and community learning.

During this project the research assistant, Lana Zannettino, questioned the tenuous link between a research culture and improved literacy and numeracy provision. Her claim was not so much a dismissal of research, rather a challenge to understand the complexity of the link between research and provision. She put it this way "it may be that creating a research culture is only one part of the answer or that particular kinds of research projects/methodologies used during the ALNARC research program were perceived by some as being more relevant, more connected to their everyday worlds".

This study attempts to take account of the fact that impact is a nebulous concept which is historical, not isolated from the conditions of the field in which it is produced, nor the expectations of stakeholders who constitute the field. This is the ground on which future research enterprises will also be evaluated.

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Appendix A: Research timeline

Timeline	Research action	Additional action
May-June 2001	ALNARC researchers discuss the overall research design. Discussions about previous aims and purposes of government funded research in this field. A considerable part of this period was spent determining the style and format of surveys to be distributed to the field, and considering a framework for analysis.	
July 2001	Ethics application to UniSA – July round – approved subject to minor changes.	
August and September 2001	Fine-tuning terms and parameters: sponsored researchers, 'field', stakeholders.	
August 2001	Fine-tuning surveys: advice from experienced survey researchers on survey content and focus of each section.	
October 2001	Trialling surveys electronically	
October 2001	Finalize surveys	Develop hard and electronic copy
October 2001	Faxes sent to state ALNARC centres confirming contact details for sponsored researchers. Maintain confidentiality of email addresses using 'blind cc' email forwarding and permission from researchers in the first instance.	
October 2001	Collation of email addresses, lists	Clarification of Privacy Act implications for web-based surveys.
Late Oct 2001	Distribution of surveys electronically to field sites/discussion lists and sponsored researchers	
Nov-Dec 2001	Interviews with 8 people involved in managing ALNARC centres during 1999-2000.	
December 2001-January 2002	Semi structured telephone interviews taped and transcribed.	Interviews transcribed and returned to interviewees for check of accuracy

January 2002	Extension of deadline for sponsored researcher and field surveys!	
Jan-Feb 2002	Collation of survey results	
Feb-Mar 2002	Analysis of qualitative data: field surveys, sponsored researcher surveys. Analysis of Directors' interviews across five categories of response.	
April 2002	Completion of draft report. Distribution to critical reading group	
May 2002	Report presented to ALNARC directors for integration with overall ALNARC research program	
May-June 2002	Feedback from acritical reading group and adjustments to report	
June 2002	Findings submitted to DEST as part of the overall ALNARC 2001-2002 research program	

APPENDIX B:

The impact of practitioner research in the adult literacy and numeracy field in Australia

Sponsored researchers' views

Dr Sue Shore

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Please return this questionaire by Friday 23rd November 2001

- In this survey ***Program*** refers to any set of organized activities (group or individual) in which you participated to learn more about doing a research project.
- ***Project*** refers to the piece of research work you completed.

1 State/territory location

■ New South Wales ■ South Australia ■ Victoria ■ Tasmania
■ Western Australia ■ Northern Territory ■ Queensland ■ ACT

2 Please mark your primary role and relationship to the field:

A	■ Practitioner;	■ manager;	■ administrator;
	■ researcher;	■ learner;	■ other
B	■ Permanent/continuing;	■ contract;	■ casual/sessional;
	■ self-employed;	■ other	
C	■ Government funding agent;	■ TAFE	■ private RTO;
	■ enterprise/industry;	■ university;	■ community provider
	■ other.		
D	■ Paid;	■ Volunteer;	■ other.

3 Target group focus of programs - if applicable:

■ Women
■ Indigenous groups
■ NESB
■ Industry-based programs
■ Rural communities
■ Unemployed
■ Youth
■ Other foci _____

4. As a result of being involved in the ALNARC sponsored research program I have increased my capacity to:

a) explain the aims and purposes of my teaching practice

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

b) explain the aims and purposes of my research practice

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

c) develop ways of talking about provision in relation to the goals of my organisation

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

d) develop ways of talking about provision in relation to individual learners and their needs

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

e) compare my organisation's effectiveness with other forms of 'literacy' provision

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

f) undertake searches to find information related to literacy and/or numeracy provision

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

g) design a research project

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

h) complete a research project

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

i) disseminate information about literacy and numeracy research

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

j) develop reports and materials to publicise research

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

k) please list the two most important gains:

l) Additional comments (optional):

5. The following question asks you to tick [■] the research training or support you received during and/or after the program and rank its usefulness:

	Very helpful	quite helpful	Undecided	not very helpful	unhelpful
5.1 Research activity					
a) workshops	■	■	■	■	■
b) lectures	■	■	■	■	■
c) regular seminar presentations	■	■	■	■	■
d) mentoring	■	■	■	■	■
e) conference presentations by you	■	■	■	■	■
5.2 Content					
a) research techniques	■	■	■	■	■
b) theoretical frameworks	■	■	■	■	■
c) materials/resources to do research	■	■	■	■	■
d) opportunities for organised reflection	■	■	■	■	■
5.3 Research support					
a) financial assistance	■	■	■	■	■
b) clerical support	■	■	■	■	■
c) editing advice	■	■	■	■	■

6. Please list the two most useful activities:

7. Did your involvement in the program help you to improve your literacy and numeracy teaching capacity?

   a. ■ Yes ■ No

   b. Please explain (or compare with previous competence):

8. Did your involvement in the program help you to improve your literacy and numeracy research capacity?

   a. ■ Yes ■ No

   b. Please explain (or compare with previous competence):

9. Did your involvement in the program impact on other colleagues or your organization?

   a. ■ Yes ■ No

   b. Please explain:

10. With the benefit of hindsight what would you change about how you approached the project? Please explain.

11. With the benefit of hindsight what additional or different support would you want to receive from ALNARC to complete your project?

THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX C:

The impact of sponsored research in the adult literacy and numeracy field:

A stakeholder's view

Dr Sue Shore
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University of South Australia
Holbrooks Road
Underdale 5032
South Australia

sue.shore@unisa.edu.au

Please return this questionaire by Friday 23rd November 2001

1) State/territory location

■ New South Wales ■ South Australia ■ Victoria ■ Tasmania
■ Western Australia ■ Northern Territory ■ Queensland ■ ACT

2) Please mark your primary role and relationship to the field:

A	■ practitioner;	■ manager;	■ administrator;
	■ researcher;	■ learner;	■ other
B	■ Permanent/continuing;	■ contract;	■ casual/sessional;
	■ self-employed;	■ other	
C	■ Government funding agent;	■ TAFE	■ private RTO;
	■ enterprise/industry;	■ university;	■ community provider
	■ other.		
D	■ Paid;	■ Volunteer;	■ other.

3) Target group focus of programs - if applicable:

■ Women
■ Indigenous groups
■ NESB
■ Industry-based programs
■ Rural communities
■ Unemployed
■ Youth
■ Other foci _____

4. The ALNARC research program has:

a) developed a visible culture of debate about literacy provision in this state/territory.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

b) developed a visible culture of debate about numeracy provision in this state/territory.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

c) been effective in improving research knowledge about adult literacy and numeracy provision.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

d) been effective in improving the quality of teacher/trainer research within the field.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

e) been effective in disseminating the results of research projects.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

f) Additional comments (optional):

5. ALNARC sponsored projects have improved :

a) my knowledge about 'literacy' teaching and learning.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

b) my organisation's capacity to deliver effective programs.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

c) my capacity to deliver effective programs.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

d) my organisation's capacity to respond to the professional development needs of educators.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

e) collaboration between organisations.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

f) networking amongst trainers/educators.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

g) Additional comments (optional):

6. Please list the main activities you associate with the ALNARC sponsored research program:

7. What were the most positive outcomes of the sponsored research program and how did they impact on your organisation's capacity to support or deliver literacy and numeracy?

8. Were there any unhelpful aspects of the sponsored research program and how did they impact on your organisation's capacity to support or deliver literacy and numeracy?

9. Please describe an incident that exemplifies a strength – or a problem – associated with the sponsored research program.

THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

Appendix D: Documented ALNARC Projects 1999-2001

Integrating literacy and numeracy in training packages: 1999

Haines, Christine & Bickmore Brand, Jennie (2000). *Language, Literacy and Numeracy in National Training Packages: Case Studies in Aged Care and Hospitality.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

Kelly and Searle (2000). *Literacy and numeracy on the motorway: A case study of the effects of the inclusion of literacy and numeracy competencies within the civil construction industry training package.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

McGuirk, Jenny (2000). *Literacy and numeracy in the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

Miles Morgan Australia Pty Ltd. (1999). *Language, Literacy and Numeracy in National Training Packages.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

Millar, Pat & Falk, Ian (2000). *Communication and Catering Competencies: A Case Study of Literacy and Numeracy Inclusion in a Training Package.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

Quelch, John (2000). *Literacy Issues Within Victoria's Job Network, Job Search Training Programs.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

Sanguinetti, Jill (2000). *The Literacy Factor: Adding Value to Training: Investigation of the inclusion of literacy in training packages in the food processing industry.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

Sanguinetti, Jill & Hartley, Robyn (2000). *Building Literacy and Numeracy into Training: A synthesis of recent research into the effects of integrating literacy and numeracy into training packages.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

Trenerry, Ruth. (2000). *Investigating literacy, language & numeracy in Training Packages.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

Integrating literacy and numeracy in training packages: 2000

Every, Anne with Young, Metta (2001). *Multiple Literacies and Life Transitions: Language, Literacy and Numeracy Issues in Aboriginal Health Worker Training - an Investigation.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

McGuirk, Jenny (2000) *'Youth at Risk': is technology an answer?* ALNARC NSW, University of Technology, Sydney. www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/nsw/nswprojects2001.html

McGuirk, Jenny, Loo Boothroyd and Kristine Highet (2001) *Key elements in successful training - a comparative study of two workplaces.* ALNARC NSW, University of Technology, Sydney. www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/nsw/nswprojects2001.html

Miles Morgan Australia Pty Ltd. (2002). *Organisational Approaches to Addressing Language, Literacy and Numeracy Skills in National Training Package Qualifications.* December 2000. Melbourne: Language Australia.

Millar, Pat (2001). *Concepts of Literacy: The Role of WELL.* The role of the Workplace English Language and Literacy program in supporting provision for literacy and numeracy in training packages. Melbourne: Language Australia.

Searle, Jean & Kelly, Ann (2002). *Acting Smart: An Investigation of Assumptions and Principles which Underpin Training and Assessment within one Civil Construction Company.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

Trenerry, Ruth (2001). *Putting it all together: Learning for Work and Learning About Work in the Horticulture Industry.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

'Special needs' projects 1999

(ALNARC). (2000). *Pebbles in a Pond: Learner, Teacher, and Policy Perspectives on Mutual Obligation*. Melbourne: Language Australia.

Containing the following chapters:

- Kelly, Sheilagh and Campbell, Liz 'Researching LLN and Mutual Obligation: an introduction to some issues', pages 1-7.
- Gurr, Patrick ' Voices of the Unemployed', pages 9-12.
- Chin, Michael ' The all-seeing eye: a stakeholder narrative of applying for the dole, pages 13-21.
- Frischke, Sue 'Mutual Obligation: how to survive and enjoy the experience', pages 23-32.
- O'Maley, Pauline 'Stakeholders' experiences of Mutual Obligation' pages 33-51.
- Stone, John 'LANT and the country learner: a city slicker's perspective', pages 53-64.
- Granwal, Philippa 'Mutual Obligation: who's paying?' pages 65-71.
- Lindfield-Ide, Sarah 'Mandatory participation in literacy/numeracy programs for unemployed young Australians: whose interests are served?', pages 73-86.
- Kelly, Sheilagh and Campbell, Liz 'Researching Mutual obligation and LLN: what does this research tell us?', 87-93.

Millar, Pat & Falk, Ian (2000). *Seniors Online: Online Literacy and Learning by Senior Citizens in Rural Centres*. Melbourne: Language Australia.

Davis, Janelle & Searle, Jean (2001). *Seeding Literacy: Adult Educators Research Their Practice*. Melbourne: Language Australia.

Containing the following chapters:

- Davis, Janelle and Searle, Jean 'supporting adult educators in researching their practice', pages 1-12.
- Horton, David and Horton, Marion 'Towards mutual benefits: Integrating and mentoring Volunteer Tutors into the everyday workings of special needs literacy classes', pages 13-38.
- McDonald, Marya 'Evaluation report of the Community Literacy Voluntary Tutor Training Program for youth workers', pages 39-62.
- Hawkins, Luaine 'Preparing students to study by flexible delivery in the Certificate in Adult General Education', pages 63-97.
- Trevino, Jenny and Davids, Jennifer, 'Small action research project on ESL literacy and pre-linguistic African women refugees', pages 99-106.

Multiliteracies projects 2000

Castleton, Geraldine and McDonald, Marya (2002) *Multiple literacies and social transformation: a case study of perceptions of literacy needs and social transformation by service providers of low skilled disadvantaged clients in an outer urban area of Brisbane*. Melbourne: Language Australia.

Johnston, Betty, Sheilagh Kelly and Ken Johnston (2001). The rise and fall of the NSW Adult Literacy Information Office. ALNARC NSW, University of Technology, Sydney. www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/nsw/nswprojects2001.html

Shore, Sue; Trenerry, Ruth & Coombe, Melanie (Eds.) (2001). *Doing Literacy, Doing Literacy Research: Researching Practice in Adult Literacy Settings.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

Containing the following chapters:

- Shore, Sue 'Teaching and researching in adult literacy and numeracy programs. An introduction', pages 1-3.
- Peterson, Jan 'The Curriculum Practices of Adult Community Education Language, Literacy and Numeracy Providers in South Australia', pages 5-28.
- Gunn, Jane 'Women Experiencing Domestic Violence: An investigation into their needs for literacy services', pages 29-43.
- Martin, Jo 'Feminist Approaches to the Women's Education Program in South Australian TAFE Institutes: parallels with adult literacy pedagogies', pages 45-77.
- Campbell, Liz 'Women at Play: Finding their voices through writing for performance'.
- Shore, Sue 'Research and Practice: unsettling a troublesome binary', pages 79-115.

Suda, Liz (2001). *Policies and Pedagogies for Lifelong Literacy: International Perspectives for the 21st Century.* Melbourne: Language Australia.

The role of adult literacy and numeracy policy, provision and research in lifelong learning and socio-economic well-being: 2001

Castleton Geraldine and Marya McDonald (2002) *(Re)positioning adult literacy and numeracy in Australia's social and economic wellbeing.*

Falk Ian and Pat Millar (2002) *Non/working lives: Implications of 'non-standard work practices' for literacy and numeracy.*

Hazel, Pat (2002). *And then there was one. Investigating the Victorian Adult Education and Resource Information Service.*

Johnston Betty (2002) *Numeracy in the making: twenty years of Australian numeracy.*

Ovens, Carolyn (2002). *Literacy for youth: what counts as success in programs for youth at risk.*

Shore, Sue (2000). *Keeping a sense of proportion. The impact of sponsored research in the Australian adult literacy and numeracy field: perspectives on the period 1999-2000.*

Suda, Liz (2002). *Discourses in greyness and diversity. Revisiting the ESL/ALBE interface.*

Trenerry Ruth (2002) *Talking about training. Literacy and numeracy training practices in industry: a comparative study across five industries.*

Discussion papers

The new world of work: implications for literacy and numeracy
Ian Falk and John Guenther

The new world of work: implications for literacy and numeracy
Ian Falk

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy in higher education
Ian Malcolm and Judith Rochecouste

What we know about youth literacy
Carolyn Ovens

Professional development in Australian adult literacy and numeracy provision
Sue Shore and Lana Zannettino

Language and literacy: confronting the challenge of policy rationalism
Liz Suda

Creating a safe literacy culture within correctional settings
Helena Zielinski

Online Forum papers – available at www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc

Literacy, numeracy and employability
John Bynner

Women and literacy in Australia
Helen Macrae and Jacinta Agostinelli

Health and literacy: perspectives in 2002
Linda Shohet

Literacy in the world of aged care workers
Linda Wyse and Nadia Casarotto

'Learnin' 'em their letters' – story, professional practice and 'new paradigm' research
Peter Waterhouse

What makes 'good' literacy and numeracy provision? Case study research of regional Australia
John Guenther

Whose economic wellbeing? A challenge to dominant discourses on the relationship between literacy and numeracy skills and (un)employment
Stephen Black

Illiteracy, financial services and social exclusion
Khaldoun Hajaj

The need for environment literacy
Ian Lowe

'Make your own way there'. An agenda for young people in the modern labour market
John Spierings

General Texts

McDonald, Marya & Castleton (2001), 'Mentoring in Adult Learning Contexts: Partners in Dialogue'. LA: Melbourne

Sanguinetti, Jill and Bradshaw, Delia (Eds.) (2000), *Considering the Research, Debating the Issues*: Proceedings of the First national ALNARC Forum February 17-18, 2000. LA, Melbourne.

Containing the following chapters:

- Sanguinetti, Jill 'Literacy in VET and Literacy in the Community: ALNARC'S Research Challenge', pages 1-4.
- Bluer, Rob 'Literacy in Training Packages: An ANTA Perspective', pages 5-8.
- Paton, Bob 'Literacy in Training Packages: An Industry Perspective', pages 9-15.
- Wyse, Linda 'Literacy in Training packages: A Registered Training Organisation (RTO) Perspective, pages 17-19.
- Raisbeck, Rhonda 'Literacy in Training Packages: A Registered Training Organisation (RTO) Perspective, pages 21-23.
- Waterhouse, Peter 'Reflections on Literacy, Workplaces and Training Packages', pages 25-30.
- Anderson, Damon 'The Implementation of Training Packages: Critical

Perspectives on Language, Literacy and Numeracy in Training Packages, pages 31-39.

- Brennan, Marie 'The Politics and Practicalities of Grassroots Research in Education', pages 41-48.
- Falk, Ian 'Sleight of Hand: Literacy, Social Capital and Social Disadvantage', pages 49-63.
- Wilson, John 'Mentoring in Practitioner-Based Research', pages 65-67.

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